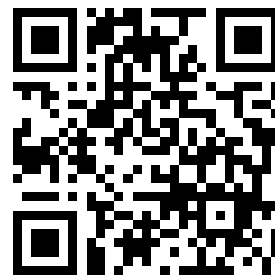

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RESTRICTED

THE SEVENTH UNITED STATES ARMY

REPORT OF OPERATIONS



FRANCE AND GERMANY

1944-1945

RESTRICTED



REPORT OF OPERATIONS

THE SEVENTH

UNITED STATES ARMY

IN FRANCE AND GERMANY

1944-1945

THREE VOLUMES



RESTRICTED

VOLUME II

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To the Officers and Enlisted Men of the
Seventh United States Army who gave their
lives this history is respectfully dedicated

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VOLUME II

CHAPTER XV

The XV Corps Joins the Seventh Army

WITH the passing of the summer the DRAGOON offensive which for more than a month had been driving German troops from defenses throughout southern France came to a halt. What was known in Seventh Army headquarters as a "crisis on the western front" was setting in, and the fall months of 1944 proved to be a critical period for both the American and the enemy forces.

The Seventh Army Command Post had moved by leapfrog advances from the coast at St. Tropez to Brignoles, Grenoble, Lons le Saunier, and Vesoul, behind its rapidly moving combat divisions. Until 1 October, when the army's advance command post opened at the Caserne Bonnard in Epinal, the headquarters had not remained in one place for a period longer than 12 days. Two of these moves, from Brignoles to Grenoble and from Grenoble to Lons le Saunier, had been for airline distances of 155 and 135 miles. At Epinal the Seventh Army headquarters settled down for two months, while its units engaged in slugfest advances against the enemy through the Vosges Mountains.

Claims Before the Vosges

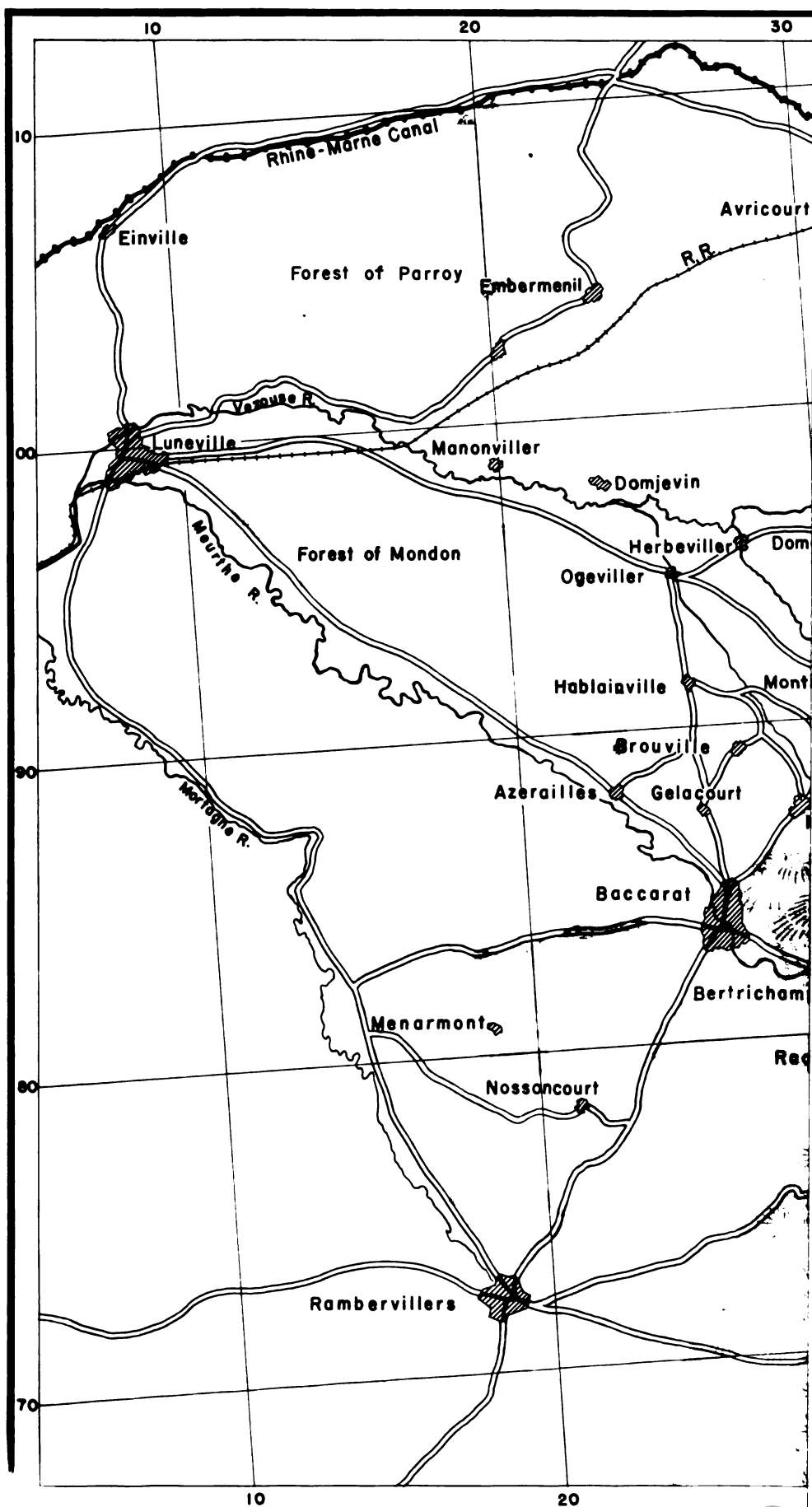
Operation DRAGOON, according to higher headquarters, had been definitely halted for lack of indispensable supplies. To the north the Third Army was also directed to assume a defensive role until sufficient resources could be accumulated for a renewed attack. The Germans were now ensconced in the slopes and forests of the Vosges foothills and for the month of October at least had the opportunity to

reorganize routed elements. General Devers, commanding the Sixth Army Group, had been "anxious to stage a powerful offensive as early as possible." Army Group, however, short of troops, had only three corps on an extended front and lacked both artillery and ammunition necessary to give proper support to sustained attacks by both the American Seventh and the First French Armies simultaneously.

Seventh Army's supply situation had been termed "critical", and there was some concern that the enemy might make a desperate use of gas and begin a sabotage and partisan campaign. Nevertheless, planning went confidently ahead for the destruction of the enemy in Lorraine and Alsace and for the crossing of the Rhine River. For a brief period the highly fluid front would be stabilized. Reserves and resources would be built up and a more favorable area of departure gained for the offensive which would seize Strasbourg and turn north to breach the Maginot and Siegfried line defenses.

Holding a relatively stable front the German defenders planned to exploit favorable terrain to the fullest advantage. Mountains and forests were to make up for what the Wehrmacht lacked in men, materiel, and morale. Incapable of military initiative, unable to launch a large-scale attack or display any general purpose other than continued defense, the enemy did his best to contain Allied penetrations of his position and to solve some of his difficult order of battle problems. The German intention was to hold the Vosges as long as possible before falling back to the Siegfried line. To that end divisional organizations were regularized; and the miscellaneous battle groups, which had retreated from southern France, were liquidated and reabsorbed all along the Seventh Army front.

The striking power of General Patch's forces was augmented in late September by the transfer of two divisions already in the line on the immediate left as part of the Third Army of the Twelfth Army Group. The XV Corps, commanded by Major General Wade H. Haislip, was assigned to the Seventh Army and passed to the control of the new headquarters on 29 September. This Corps included the 2nd French Armored Division; the 79th Infantry Division, which had just taken and secured Luneville; the 106th Cavalry Group; and attached troops. Its



mission, until new operational instructions were issued, was to protect the right flank of the Twelfth Army Group and to continue its offensive to secure the Luneville area south of the line Chaumont-Luneville-Sarrebourg.

Northeast of the city of Luneville the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division attempted to make a stand blocking the advance to a line of departure for the Saverne Gap. In this sector south of the Rhine-Marne Canal the XV Corps was already engaged on 29 September, when it was assigned to Seventh Army. Since the fall of Luneville the enemy had been forced back beyond the Meurthe and had taken up strong positions in the Forest of Parroy against the 79th Division. With the fall of Rambervillers on 30 September and the threat to



MAJOR GENERAL
WADE H. HAISLIP

"...to protect the right flank..."

Baccarat by the 2nd French Armored Division and VI Corps the Germans were losing their river line completely and were faced with the prospect of being pushed back to the mountains.

The Vosges Mountains east of Luneville are low, generally rounded, heavily forested, and arranged in parallel ridges with an average height of 3,000 feet. The ground slopes more gradually to the west than to the east, falling in a series of plateaus toward the Lorraine Plain. Ascent is usually easy on this side of the range, but the narrow defiles which the arteries of communication follow through the Vosges do not permit free vehicular maneuver. The southern boundary of XV Corps extended northeast through the towns of Rambervillers, Baccarat, and Badonviller, where it ran up to the outline of the High Vosges Massif. The northern boundary was formed by the Rhine-Marne Canal which runs from Nancy east to Strasbourg, passing south of Sarrebourg and through Saverne.

The converging lines of the Rhine-Marne Canal and the High Vosges Massif form a 15-mile funnel which narrows to the east. Einville, on the canal just north of Luneville, is 22 miles from Rambervillers to

the south; but the swamps beyond Parroy are only seven miles from the High Vosges Massif. This corridor yields access to the Saverne Gap, a low, narrow passage which links the Lorraine and Alsatian Plains and



THE VOSGES MOUNTAINS

"... The Vosges Mountains east of Luneville are low, generally rounded, heavily forested ..."

serves to divide the higher ranges from the Low Vosges to the north. The hills and mountains taper at both sides of the divide; and, although they provide some defense, they also present possibilities for sharp thrusts directed at the Gap.

The terrain between the boundaries represents a portion of the Lorraine Plain which is relatively level and covered with hardwood forest. Minor rivers cut through the plain. The Meurthe rises in the High Vosges, flows through St. Die and northwest through Raon l'Etape, Baccarat, and Luneville to Nancy, where it joins the Moselle. The Vezouse rises in the Vosges east of Blamont, captures a few streams,

and flows west through Luneville into the Meurthe. The Mortange, flowing northwest through Rambervillers, also empties into the Meurthe near Luneville. The network of roads, although constricted by the Vosges terrain, is adequate for military traffic. One main road extends along the eastern fringe of the Meurthe Valley linking Luneville with Baccarat. Another runs east through Blamont, Heming, Sarrebourg, through the Gap to Saverne. Railroad lines also bind Luneville with Saverne to the east and with Baccarat and Epinal to the south.

The XV Corps continued to push against German positions east of Luneville; and there was no change in mission, as its transfer from Third to Seventh Army was effected. Third Army troops to the north pressed on against the approaches to Metz. To the south VI Corps fought in the foothills of the Vosges east of the Moselle. The Army mission during October and early November, was to clear approaches to the Vosges passes in zone, to seize terrain from which to launch an offensive designed to carry the Seventh Army through the Vosges defenses, to Strasbourg, and over the Rhine.

Into the Forest of Parroy

The Forest of Parroy, the Germans' strongly-held forward bastion, presented the first problem for operations of the XV Corps as a part of Seventh Army. Under what had been until very recently the ordinary circumstances of offensive action, the forest might conceivably have been by-passed. But the general stabilization of the front, in contrast to the highly fluid condition of preceding weeks, led to the decision to "attack it and clean it out . . . preparatory to further advances." XV Corps, too, was handicapped by the general supply crisis. At the time of its transfer to Seventh Army its ammunition and gasoline stocks were gravely depleted. It would be the better part of a month before the rail capacity of the 500-mile army supply line could be increased sufficiently to relieve the critical situation and to begin the accumulation of forward reserves for the support of a full-scale attack. Nor was corps

and army artillery strength in Sixth Army Group up to a standard required for concurrent Seventh Army and First French Army assaults. "Prior decisions on high level" had committed heavy field artillery units on the *DRAGOON* troop list to the continued support of the forces in Italy. At the time of General Marshall's visit to XV Corps area on



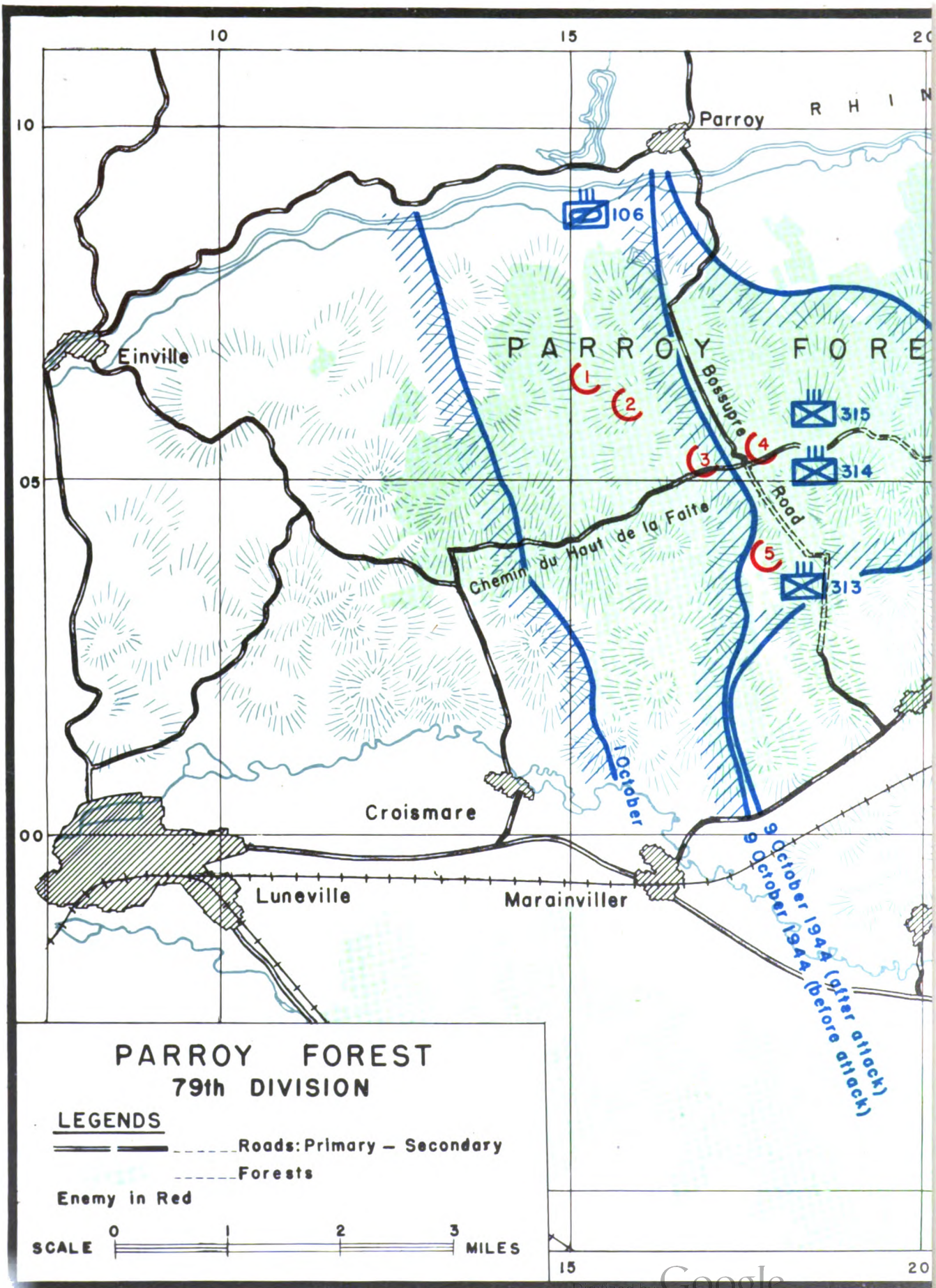
MAJOR GENERAL
IRA T. WYCHE

"...attack it and clean it out..."

9 October, battery strengths were "at the lowest level of their history." Finally, the offensive capabilities of both the 79th Division, commanded by Major General Ira T. Wyche, and the 2nd French Armored Division, commanded by General Philippe Francois Leclerc, had been substantially compromised by previous engagements in the campaign in northern France.

In contrast to the Allied predicament the German situation was in many ways improved. After a month of retrograde movement, elements of the German Nineteenth Army had been able to effect a junction with the First German Army in northern France in the vicinity of Epinal. In the Baccarat-Dieuze area in front of XV Corps and the Third Army's XII Corps, the enemy had concentrated an exceptionally large force of armor in deference to the relatively accessible terrain. A heavy line of defensive works ran from the outskirts of the Vosges Massif at Baccarat through Blamont to the swamps of Heming. This hastily-constructed line consisted of almost continuous fire-trenches supplemented by pillboxes and antitank ditches. Elements of the 11th and 15th Panzer Divisions were combined with a number of miscellaneous units of Fortress Machine Gun and Infantry Battalions to oppose XV Corps. In front of this defense line the enemy strongly held the Forest of Parroy.

This forest is "a vicious tangle of second growth timber and underbrush", about six miles long and five miles wide, blanketing low ridges northeast of Lunéville between the Rhine-Marne Canal and the Vezouse River. It is bisected by an east-west road, the Chemin du Haut



de la Faite, which generally follows the crest of a low ridge; and it is traversed by a number of tracks and firebreaks, including the abandoned roadbeds of old World War I narrow-gauge railways.

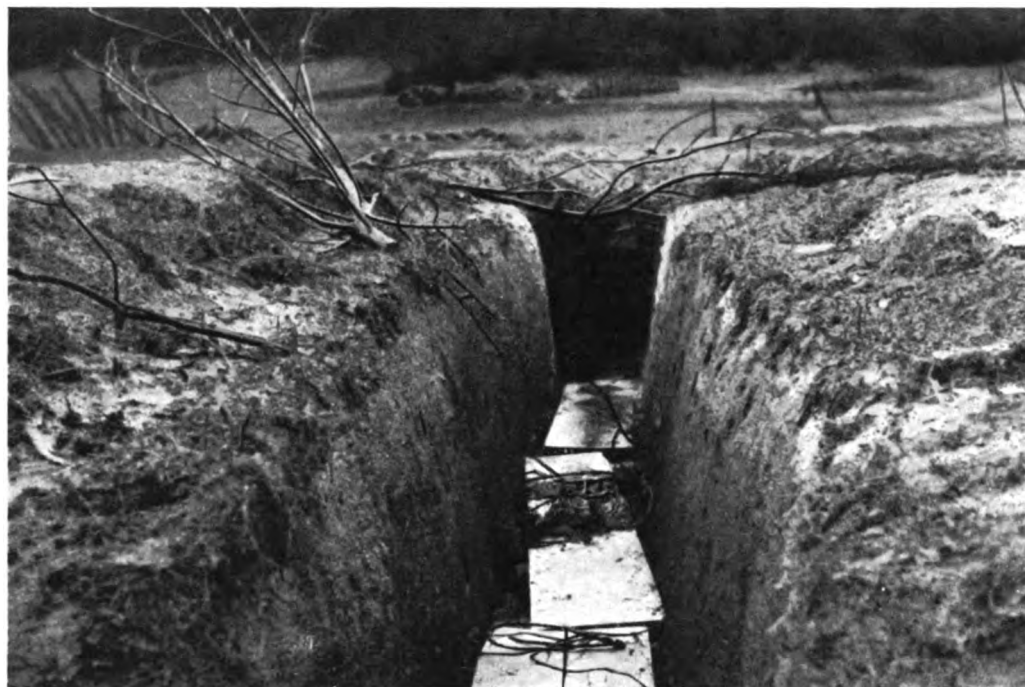


**GENERAL MARSHALL VISITS XV CORPS COMMAND POST
IN FOREST OF PARROY**

"... At the time of General Marshall's visit to XV Corps area on 9 October, battery strengths were at the lowest level of their history . . ."

Within the forest elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division awaited the American assault, and two regiments of the 79th Division were sent in to the attack which had been delayed for several days. The heavy preliminary aerial bombardment of the entrances and road-junctions of the woods had been held up by bad weather. On 28 September bombers were dispatched; and, although the attack was not carried out in the hoped-for strength, the initial infantry assault was successful. The enemy had not been "seriously" affected by the bombardment, but infantry troops of the 79th Division reached the western edge

of the forest without difficulty. The 315th Infantry Regiment attacked north of the main Faite road and the 313th Infantry south. In the woods resistance stiffened. The enemy was using tanks in support of his



GERMAN TRENCHES DUG IN BEHIND BARBED WIRE
EMPLACEMENTS AND MINE FIELDS

"... this hastily constructed line consisted of almost continuous fire-trenches . . ."

hastily-dug positions, and despite the difficulty of terrain the Mark IV's managed to stop farther advance. The employment and maneuver of armor in thick woods became the outstanding feature of the German forest defense and, later, of the American offensive which cleared Parroy.

The attack, begun in the afternoon of 28 September, had, by nightfall achieved a penetration of about one kilometer into the forest. Advancing slowly against increasing opposition on the following day, both regiments received counterattacks; and the 313th was forced to fall back until an additional battalion was committed to regain the ground. The enemy attacked again at the junction of the 1st and 3rd

battalions, with tanks moving up and down the road firing into the lines and infantry making successful infiltrations. That night there was only confusion. With the reorganization of the 3rd battalion, the 2nd bat-



TANK SET UP AS A ROAD BLOCK

"... The employment and maneuver of armor in thick woods became the outstanding feature of the German forest defense ..."

talion moved up to its rear to protect the northern flank exposed in front of the 315th Regiment. An enemy attack at that point was repulsed late in the afternoon of 30 September; and shortly before midnight contact was established with the 315th Regiment, which had pushed ahead and narrowed the gap. Both regiments had gained about 1,000 yards.

On 1 October the 314th Regiment was committed from Croismare to cut off the southern peninsula of the woods, to move through the sector of the 313th, and to join the 315th at the Faite road. That day, the division made an overall gain of another 1,000 yards against heavy

mortar and artillery concentrations but only moderate small arms fire. Pockets of resistance, with barbed-wire and mine-field support extending from roads and tracks into the woods themselves, held advances



**ELEMENTS OF THE 314TH INFANTRY MOVING TOWARD THE
FOREST DE PARROY**

"... The 314th Infantry Regiment was committed from Croismare to cut off the southern peninsula of the woods ..."

down to an almost inch-by-inch pace. The Germans were especially formidable at the central clearing in the southern sector of the forest which covered their supply route from Laneuveville-aux-Bois. All well-defined avenues of approach were registered in by artillery and kept under interdicting fire.

To the north, on the left flank of the Parroy offensive, the 315th Regiment met intense automatic fire at a junction known as Point No. 1 (see map) and suffered a counterattack in battalion strength at a second junction, Point No. 2, farther east. At that stage the 106th Cavalry

Reconnaissance Squadron, which had been screening the northern flank of XV Corps by maintaining motorized patrols in the narrow area between the edge of the forest and the Rhine-Marne Canal, was drawn into the woods. In the center a battalion of the 314th moving northward succeeded in pinching out the 313th and made their link on the main Faite road. Below, at the central clearing, the enemy held the two other battalions at the western fringe; and there the forces continued to face each other for more than a week, until the enemy evacuated positions on the night of 9-10 October.

The Battle in the Woods

American difficulties were due in part to natural obstacles and in part to the effective tactics of the German defense. The thickness of forest cover limited visibility to the flanks as well as to the front; attacking units were compelled to maintain close physical contact with each other. Thus the speed of the advance was generally held down to that of the unit meeting the heaviest resistance, and the "tail of the advance" had always to be kept closed in. The deadly effect of enemy artillery fire was increased by a high proportion of tree-bursts throughout the battle in the forest. Troops soon learned that foxholes had to be covered and logs laid over trenches to provide overhead protection. In many cases, old World War I positions were converted into personnel shelters.

The enemy held his main body well behind the nebulous front and kept only small groups forward where they could hear the attackers coming through the woods. Accurate observed fire could be brought down by the Germans without endangering their own main line of resistance placed behind the wide dispersion area affected by tree-bursts. Small arms resistance was only scattered and occasional, thrown out to cover the escape of the forward observers at the last moment.

The 314th Regiment had cut up from the southwest to the Faite road, and the pinched-off 313th sent out patrols to clear the rear areas of enemy who had infiltrated. On 3 October a roadblock, on Point

No. 3, the Faite trail, just west of the main junction in the forest, was reduced by a flanking movement of tanks swinging around the road behind the block. This employment of armor, despite the difficulties of maneuver, represented a tactical departure for the American forces. The Germans had demonstrated the efficacy of armor as mobile artillery in forest fighting.

The German strongpoint in the heart of the Forest of Parroy was assaulted by two regiments moving in abreast to the vicinity of the main junction. On the left flank elements of the 315th Regiment succeeded on 4 October in reaching the north-south Bossupre road above its junction with the Faite trail, outflanking and reducing Point No. 1, two miles northwest of the junction. The units moving east on the Faite road, however, were stopped short of their objective. The attack of the 314th on the right flank was checked by an enemy "spoiling" drive in company strength supported by six tanks. Again in the afternoon the 2nd Battalion of the 314th was stopped by tank fire down the road and by heavy mortar concentrations. The Germans capped their defensive efforts with an infantry assault which pierced the battalion line.

The next day, a wide-swinging blow designed to envelop the enemy force at the Faite-Bossupre junction was delivered at Point No. 4. The 1st Battalion of the 315th Regiment moved through the left flank and proceeded to sweep down and back to the southwest. The road was reached; but once again German infantry and tanks, elements of the 11th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion, broke through and some American troops were temporarily cut off to the south. The following morning and afternoon, the whole force managed to abandon its forward positions and swing back into the line defined by the Bossupre road. The 106th Cavalry continued to clear out the northwestern portion of the forest, but the attack generally was suspended to facilitate preparations for the offensive of 9 October.

Just prior to this offensive, units of the 79th Division were disposed as follows: on the right flank the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 314th still faced the enemy across the clearing in the southern sector of the forest; to their left was a sizeable gap, beyond which the 2nd

Battalion held its positions before the crucial Faite-Bossupre road-junction (Point No. 4) with its left flank on the main east-west road; north of the road the 3rd Battalion of the 315th Regiment was also close to the junction; to its left were the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 315th Regiment. About one-half of the total area of the Forest of Parroy had been cleared.

The unremitting pressure had compelled the enemy to draft units from quieter sectors just to the north and south to implement the defensive lines in the woods. Replacements entered as units and were committed immediately. Soon the enemy was forced to rely only on the troops already in the forest; adjacent areas had been stripped to a minimum and there was no evidence of large units available in the rear area for replacement purposes. There was a high proportion of older men among German replacements; but the enemy line was bolstered according to availability.

The new assault and a cover plan were initiated simultaneously. At 0630 hours on 9 October a diversion at Marainviller south of the forest was started. Tanks brought up by the 1st Battalion of the 313th Regiment fired into the woods. The Germans "rose to the bait" and shelled Marainviller throughout the morning. Meanwhile, on the northern flank, the 2nd Battalion of the 315th began its push to the high ground in the eastern portion of the forest, which if held would make the enemy's remaining positions untenable. Objectives on the high ground were reached by 1800 hours, and two hours later when the 1st Battalion drew up on the right, the investment of the forest ridge was complete.

The heaviest opposition to the advance was met at the cross-roads in the center of the forest, Point No. 4. The 315th's 3rd Battalion jumped off to push directly east on the north side of the Faite road toward the high-ground objective of the regiment. The Germans were well dug-in east of the Bossupre and the battalion managed to get across only after bitter fighting. At 0835 hours it was diverted from its course by an order to assist in the reduction of Point No. 4. The troops had moved across the Bossupre trail and now wheeled to the southeast

through intense small arms fire to cut the Faite road several hundred yards behind the crossroads. From the south the 2nd Battalion of the 314th Regiment, moving armor down the track of an abandoned narrow



SMOKE GENERATOR IN ACTION

" . . . Neutralized by heavy smoke, cut off by a double envelopment, the German stronghold in the heart of Parroy was smashed . . . "

gauge railway which ran past the German strongpoint, succeeded in moving behind the enemy position in a similar flanking maneuver.

Neutralized by heavy smoke, cut off by a double envelopment, the German stronghold in the heart of Parroy was smashed. With the capture of the high ground to the east and the reduction of Point No. 4, the 79th Division had "in effect ended the battle for the forest." The 313th Regiment attacked and drove to the southeastern corner of the forest, delayed only by mines. That night the sole remaining German position, Point No. 5, holding out in the southern peninsula of woods,

was abandoned. Equipment and unburied dead were left behind. Some 2,000 men committed to stop the American advance had been cleared out.

The bold use of armor in the forest was the outstanding feature



UNBURIED GERMANS

"... Some 2000 men committed to stop the American advance had been cleared out . . ."

of German, and later of American, tactics during the operation. The density of cover forced the tanks to keep for the most part to the trails and fire-breaks, but wherever a clearing or thin growth made it possible tanks deployed off the roads. On occasion, tanks had even been used as supply vehicles when the rain-sodden tracks proved impassable for other transport. Artillery tactics were hindered by the virtual impossibility of visual observation through the woods, making it necessary to resort to unobserved fire using map data. Every effort was made to move the infantry through the forest rather than along mapped roads

and tracks. The whole operation, because of the difficulties of control and orientation in thickly-wooded terrain, was confined to narrow fronts and limited objectives.



MUDDY ROAD IN LUNEVILLE AREA

"... On occasion, tanks had been used as supply vehicles when the rain sodden tracks proved impassable for other transport . . ."

The Push for High Ground

Having driven the enemy from the forest of Parroy stronghold, the 79th Division pushed farther east to establish itself on more strategic high ground. Two regiments, the 313th and 314th, had taken position astride the railroad and highway south of the forest along a line which included Laneuveville-aux-Bois, former German supply center, and Manonviller. On 13 October Embermenil was occupied, but south of the town strong flanking fire from the railroad station hindered progress until it was captured the next afternoon. Still the Germans had ex-

cellent observation over the western slope of their high ground and had set up a pillbox, extensive mine fields, and wire entanglements to defend it. The effectiveness of armor was greatly reduced by recent heavy rains,



RESULT OF TORRENTIAL DOWNPOUR IN THE EMBERMENIL AREA

" . . . The effectiveness of armor was greatly reduced by recent heavy rains . . . "

and most of the tanks in the attack bogged down in the mud. An assault on 15 October by the 313th Regiment fell short of the objective.

During the next few days the Germans supplemented their defense with a series of local attacks supported by tanks. Their blows were aborted and absorbed, and the 79th made new plans for a divisional attack. As early as 23 September staff officers of the Sixth Army Group at a conference at the Seventh Army Command Post had mentioned the possibility that Seventh Army might receive the 44th Infantry Division then at Cherbourg.

In order to prepare new divisions for maximum combat efficiency it was contemplated that they be attached in regimental

combat teams to experienced divisions. The 44th Division was tentatively attached to XV Corps. An advance party from this division had arrived



MAJOR GENERAL
ROBERT L. SPRAGINS
*"...introduced into the line
gradually..."*

at Seventh Army Headquarters on 11 October. On 17 October the 44th Division, commanded by Major General Robert L. Spragins, closed in the Luneville area. One regimental combat team, the 114th, was attached to the 79th Division for operations and eventual relief. It was planned that the other two regiments, the 71st and the 324th, would be introduced into the line gradually. The XV Corps front had remained relatively unchanged for several days.

The 79th Division, according to the provisions of Field Order No. 21, issued on 19 October, was to attack the high ground east of the Forest of Parroy with three regiments. Assistance on the extreme right flank with a demonstration by fire was to be extended by the 114th Regiment of the newly arrived 44th Division. Arrangements were made for additional artillery, and the 44th Division's batteries with five battalions of XV Corps were to fire in direct or general support.

On 21 October the 313th Regiment attacked on the left and overran fixed positions at the Bois de L'Ourson northeast of Embermenil; attacking in the center, the 315th overcame stiff resistance at the Bois Henry, southeast of Embermenil, and by noon had also gained a portion of the high ground. The Germans attempted to exploit the gap between the two regiments, but armor and division artillery drove them off. On the right flank, mired tanks delayed the advance of the 314th Infantry only temporarily. The next day all objectives were taken and positions on the high ground were being consolidated.

On the north flank of XV Corps the Third Army's XII Corps was making only limited progress toward the east. On 21-22 October elements of the 26th Infantry Division were fighting in and around Moncourt, three miles northeast of the village of Parroy. Farther north

Third Army units were meeting stiff resistance on the approaches to Metz. Contact was maintained, however, between XV and XII Corps by cavalry.

The pattern of enemy operations was clear, "his forces defending strongly where threatened by American advances but remaining generally quiet" in other sectors. While the 79th Division was engaged in pounding its way through the German forward positions, the 2nd French Armored Division (or the *Division Blindée*), on the southern flank of XV Corps maintained by and large, a passive attitude. On 30 September one of General Leclerc's combat commands took part in the capture of Rambervillers which the 45th Division entered from the south. The following day, task forces of Combat Command V cut the Rambervillers-Baccarat road as the 45th Division completed occupation of Rambervillers. The success of this operation threatened the northern flank of the enemy facing the VI Corps in the Vosges. Thus the advance of the northern wing of the VI Corps into the Vosges was facilitated. After its cooperation with VI Corps, the 2nd French Armored Division adopted a policy of "watchful waiting" influenced in part at Rambervillers by soggy terrain which impeded the passage of armor. The enemy facing the French appeared to be content with this development.

The limited extent of operations conducted by XV Corps allowed the Wehrmacht time to emerge from its phase of desperate improvisation. Panzer and Grenadier units along the northern sector of the Seventh Army front were showing semblances of greater control and organization. The enemy was absorbing the various battle groups which had been employed as stop-gaps into more substantial formations. The trend now was to shift divisions, though battered, from comparatively quiet areas to sectors which were pressed. The 553rd Volks Grenadier Division arrived on 16 October to replace elements of the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, which had been opposing the 79th Division. Toward the close of the month the 361st Volks Grenadier Division appeared in the battle order to effect the relief of the remaining elements. Thus, the First and Nineteenth German Armies again had a common boundary. Stop-gap

units having been absorbed and recommitted, these armies joined in the Baccarat area where elements of the 21st Panzer Division held the line.

The main German defense line from the swamps to the High Vosges was being elaborated continuously; and it was now, according to estimate, some two to three miles deep. Handicapped by supply difficulties, as the heavy volume of daylight railway traffic plainly indicated, the Germans nevertheless were exploiting the advantage of adverse weather conditions which limited the activities of the Allied tactical air force. More than that, in the period immediately after the Battle of Parroy, they offered a series of local counterattacks, increased artillery fire, and stubborn defense of well-prepared positions. The enemy was determined to impose maximum loss and delay before giving ground.

In mid-October the 44th Division had begun to join XV Corps, and the 114th Regiment had taken over the southern sector in the zone of the 79th Division. The new division was to be "prepared for maximum combat efficiency as soon as possible." On 23 October the 71st Regiment was moved into the center of the line. The next day the 324th Infantry Regiment was committed on the left, and relief of the 79th Division was completed. This technique of gradual introduction to the line held to a minimum the shock and confusion attending transition to combat.

The 79th Division, after more than four months of almost continuous fighting, proceeded to a rest area at Luneville; and the 44th occupied the recently-won and tactically strong positions facing the Vosges. On 25 October the new troops underwent their so-called "baptism of fire", as the Germans attacked repeatedly on the left flank. The 324th Infantry held its positions; tanks and assault guns were brought up from the rear for additional defensive support.

The activities of the XV Corps on this front were confined to a consolidation of the gains made previously. The enemy now assumed a passive role and on the night of 28-29 October abandoned forward positions in Le Remabois, a wooded area between Embermenil and Leintrey, and Domjevin, withdrawing to the general line from Leintrey to Blemerey. On 2 November the 114th Regiment occupied Domjevin and the high ground east of the town.

The final blows in the struggle to secure a suitable area from which to launch the great Vosges offensive were delivered by General Leclerc's *Division Blindée*. On 25 October Seventh Army ordered the capture of Merviller and the cutting of all roads leading out of Baccarat. According to General Patch's directive the attack to isolate Badonviller, Raon L'Etape, and Brouville would begin before 1 November. The 2nd French Armored Division began preparations for this maneuver which would assist the progress of VI Corps toward the Meurthe River between St. Die and Raon L'Etape.

Intelligence reports indicated that the enemy here was prepared for an armored attack. In fact, two lines of antitank defenses had been organized to defend against an attack from the west at the Baccarat road intersection and the axis Baccarat-Montigny-Domevre. Evidently the Germans believed that the rains had limited armored exploitation of terrain to the secure surfaces of the roads. However, the French demonstrated "by experiment" that their tanks could be employed by following the slopes and the high ground.

The first defense line of the Germans barred the routes from Luneville to Baccarat and to Montigny. Antitank forces were distributed from the Meurthe River on the south up to the Vezouse. Hablainville, just east of the Mondon Forest and in the center of the road net, linked the line from Azerailles to Ogeviller. An infantry screen joined the strong points which were encircled by large mine-fields and antitank ditches and defended by 75mm antitank guns. A short distance behind the first, a second supporting line included Gelacourt and Brouville and was extended farther north to Ogeviller by the Verdurette River. Tanks were concentrated in rear areas, and some 22 88mm guns of a German antitank battalion were being brought up to cover the Seventh Army routes of approach.

On the morning of 31 October French armored columns raced out of the Mondon Forest. One column of Combat Command V, which was to screen the northern flank of the attack by progressing to the Verdurette River, by-passed the enemy strong point at Hablainville, searched for intact bridges to make a crossing, and finally at about noon cut the Baccarat route to Domevre. The first mission of General Leclerc

was accomplished. Other armored columns, operating farther south, reached out to Merviller via Brouville. A northward turn on the main Baccarat-Domevre route resulted in the fall of Montigny before the day was over.

The assault of Combat Command D paralleled the CCV operation. Two armored columns moved out of the southeastern sector of the Mondon Forest. The first drove to Gelacourt, swung south to Baccarat, and, after destroying strong antitank defenses, entered the city. The second column had moved south and had neutralized Azerailles before noon. Elements of this force later completed the occupation of Baccarat. The German positions in this area between the Meurthe and the Vezouse Rivers had been cut, penetrated, and destroyed.

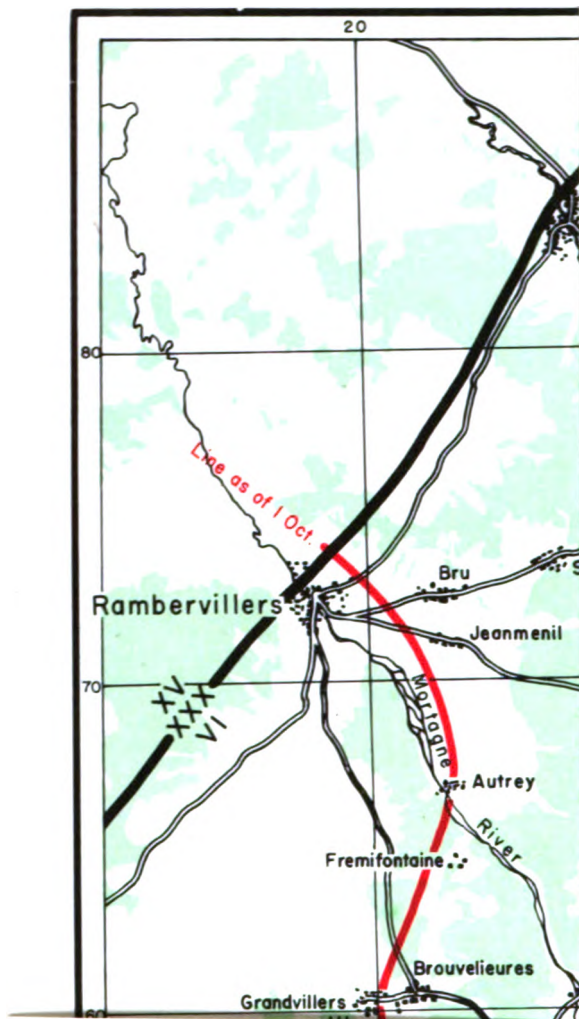
South of the Meurthe, Combat Commands L and R, which had simulated an offensive, moved up to capture Menarmont and Nossencourt, two villages just north of Rambervillers. They then took up positions just outside the city of Baccarat. In 12 hours the mission had been practically accomplished. By 2000 hours on 31 October the northern portion of Baccarat was completely cleared, and the Blette River near Montigny had been reached. The enemy had been taken completely by surprise at the suddenness and the strength of the armored assaults, and further French exploitation of the advantage was inevitable. In the following days the *Division Blindée* occupied the whole of Baccarat; its southern combat commands crossed the Meurthe and drove north to the Vezouse, reducing Ogeville and Herbeviller despite heavy artillery fire and minefields; reconnaissance elements were sent up the Meurthe Valley toward Raon L'Etape and cooperated with the 117th Reconnaissance Troop to capture Bertrichamps. The French 2nd Armored Division was now holding a line from the Meurthe between Baccarat and Raon L'Etape north across the Blette to the Vezouse River.

At points northeast of Baccarat these Seventh Army penetrations threatened the main German defensive positions before the Vosges Mountains. The enemy offered strong opposition to any further armored exploitation beyond Vacqueville toward Blamont and began concentrating his own armor in the Montigny area. General Leclerc's forces,

however, had facilitated the advance of VI Corps toward Raon L'Etape and had won an excellent zone of departure for the coming offensive.

This pre-Vosges interlude was brought to a close by a Seventh Army Directive dated 5 November which outlined the November offensive. XV Corps and VI Corps in a coordinated maneuver were to break through the Vosges defenses and secure Strasbourg on the Rhine. The part that XV Corps was to play in this offensive was elaborated by the issuance of Corps Field Order No. 11 on 8 November. The limited opening blows by Seventh Army since 1 October had made possible large-scale maneuvers and assaults. The time had been one of preparation for future operations, and both Allied and German forces engaged themselves with problems of regrouping and resupply. XV Corps actions at the Forest of Parroy and at Baccarat were not isolated phenomena undertaken with some vague idea of "maintaining pressure upon the enemy" but were battles which deprived the enemy of his forward positions and pushed him back to his main line of resistance.

During this October and early November interlude VI Corps, to the south of the XV Corps sector, had been engaged in the same sort of activity against the enemy to secure positions from which a new offensive could be launched. The advance on the VI Corps front from the Moselle to the Meurthe had been slow, but the path had been cleared for the November offensive. The Germans had gained time, time to revamp a shattered army, time to erect defensive positions which supplemented favorable terrain features. The new offensive would prove which of the opposing forces had employed that time most effectively.



CHAPTER XVI

Static Warfare in the Vosges

WHILE the XV Corps was still fighting in the Parroy-Baccarat sector, the VI Corps, having crossed the Moselle, was engaged on the forested foothills of the Vosges from Rambervillers south to Ferdrupt. VI Corps troops not only faced a strengthened enemy and prepared defenses but fought through rain and cold, fog and mud. For six weeks, from 1 October to 15 November, their advances might be more easily measured in yards than in miles, as they fought only limited engagements for strategic positions.

At the close of September the VI Corps was firmly established in the Vosges foothills along a north-south line running generally from Rambervillers through Autrey, Grandvillers, Fays, St. Jean du Marche, to St. Ame on the Moselotte River and south to Ferdrupt on the Moselle. To the north of the boundary, Epinal-Rambervillers-Baccarat-Badonviller-Wagenbourg, was the newly assigned XV Corps. To the south of the boundary, Lure-Melissey-Le Thillot to Erstein, south of Strasbourg, was the First French Army.

Among the difficulties that developed between the First French and American Seventh Armies was the question of a boundary between the two armies. General Devers of Sixth Army Group indicated on 29 September that General De Lattre had requested that the boundary be moved farther north in order to give the French more room for maneuver. In a discussion between the Seventh Army Chief of Staff, General White, and General Devers it was pointed out that lines of advance would progressively give the desired maneuver space; further-

more, cramping and narrowing the VI Corps zone would only impede and slow its progress. The boundary remained the same until 14 October when it was modified by a slight shift to the north.

Another problem which sprang up between the armies related to the supply situation. Repeated requests for assistance were made to Seventh Army by the First French Army, and as much aid as possible was given. Tension was perhaps most acute when Colonel Linares presented at Seventh Army Headquarters a copy of an unsigned memorandum prepared for the Commanding General of Sixth Army Group by the French Army. It included the statement:

In any case, it is a truly thankless situation for an Army committed in a full scale battle to thus find itself abandoned without gasoline and without ammunition. On the other hand, it has been proven that, contrary to established forecasts, this Army has been discriminated against during the last 20 days in a way seriously prejudicial to its life and to its capabilities for action.

Complications were partly the result of transfer of responsibility for the First French Army from Seventh Army, which had been operating in the place of an army group, to the Sixth Army Group. Furthermore, the French Staff and Supply Services lacked the efficiency that comes from experience; and there were also the expected differences of language and customs. Patient work by staff and liaison sections was required, particularly during these critical months of snail's-pace advances. Combat units of both armies worked with each other under all conditions to achieve assigned objectives; VI Corps and French troops continued to advance side by side in the operation which had begun on the Riviera beaches.

On 29 September Seventh Army had issued Field Order No. 6, which directed VI Corps to advance on the St. Die-Molsheim axis through the Saales Pass to Strasbourg, prepared to permit the First French Army to participate in the capture of Strasbourg, and directed XV Corps to advance in zone toward Sarrebourg and to assist VI Corps in the capture of Rambervillers, Baccarat, and Badonviller. The direction of army advance was straight to the northeast. It became apparent during the month of October that, although Strasbourg remained an ultimate ob-

jective, the more immediate problem was to secure the western foothills of the Vosges and break the German Meurthe River winter defense line in front of VI Corps.

The most important town in the VI Corps area blocking the way to the Vosges passes was St. Die on the Meurthe River; it was, therefore, the focal point of the VI Corps drive. St. Die is the industrial, commercial, and communications center of the region. From it radiate roads leading through the Vosges in three directions to the Alsace Plain; one road runs northeast through the Saales Pass to Strasbourg; one runs east through the Ste. Marie Pass to Selestat; and one goes southeast



SLOW PROGRESS IN THE VOSGES FORESTS

"... Secondary and local roads are narrow with sharp turns and steep gradients. During wet weather they are generally unsuitable for military traffic ..."

through the Bonhomme Pass to Colmar. Along the Meurthe River the Germans had established a winter line of defense, using the area around Raon L'Etape to the north and Gerardmer to the south as anchor strongholds.

Use of roads in the VI Corps area was restricted by rough terrain, and the main routes were often bottlenecked by narrow village streets. Secondary and local roads are narrow with sharp turns and steep gradients. During wet weather they are generally unsuitable for military traffic. Dense forests cover the mountain sides, offering excellent concealment but creating a serious problem in the employment of armor and the movement of troops.

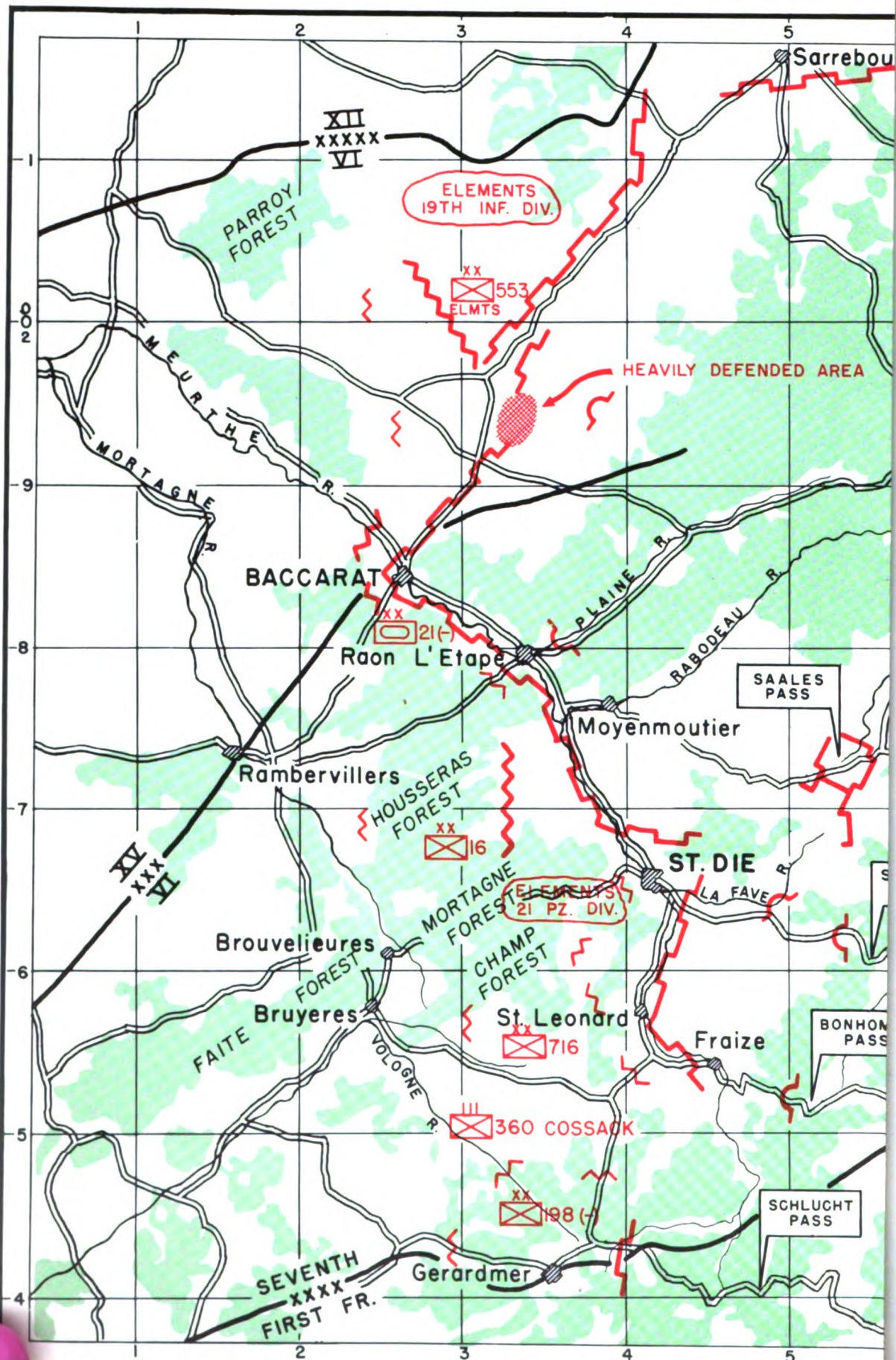
Unfavorable weather worked with the Germans in opposing the VI Corps' drive through the Vosges. After September weather conditions grew worse. During October there were only ten days of



TANK STALLED IN THE BELMONT AREA OF THE VOSGES

"... Unfavorable weather worked with the Germans in opposing the VI Corps drive through the Vosges . . ."

good flying, and by 19 November cloudy skies and the unsettled weather of early winter had prohibited effective air support for 15 days. Ground troops suffered from the bad weather—snow, rain, and biting cold.



In the VI Corps sector elements of the German 21st Panzer, the 16th Infantry, the 716th Infantry, the 198th Infantry, the 338th Infantry, and the 189th Reserve Divisions were identified in the line. Photo interpretation and reports from agents revealed enemy preparations along the Meurthe River and the areas around Raon L'Etape to the north and Gerardmer to the south. Defense in depth featured antitank ditches and machine gun and antitank positions with numerous fire and communication trenches. Strongpoints were strategically located to block the west-east routes of communication through the Vosges. Prisoners reported that a "Fuehrer Befehl", an edict of Hitler, had been issued to hold at all costs. Army Intelligence pointed out on 30 September, "It is evident that the enemy is fighting where he can, and with what troops he can lay hands upon, and shows all signs of attempting to prevent the battle from reaching into Germany. The enemy does not yet show any signs of admitting defeat, and it should be expected that he will continue to hold every piece of ground until he has been forced to surrender it."

During the first two weeks of October warfare was practically static. Supplies were brought up and planning elaborated to carry out the mission assigned VI Corps by Seventh Army Field Order No. 6. On the corps left flank the 45th Division completed mopping up in the Rambervillers area, then attacked southeast in the direction of Brouvelieures and Bruyeres; in the corps center the 36th Division continued to drive toward Bruyeres while the 3rd Division continued to protect the corps right flank along a wide front. It was recognized that St. Die was the key to the Vosges passes, that towns like Bruyeres and Brouvelieures guarding the approaches to St. Die would have to be taken by assault, and that the German Winter Line along the Meurthe would have to be cracked before the Alsace Plain and Strasbourg could be reached.

On 11 October Operations Instructions No. 1 was issued by VI Corps outlining operations to secure a suitable line of departure for an assault to capture the southwest bank of the Meurthe River from St. Die north to Moyenmoutier. First, Bruyeres and Brouvelieures were to be taken by the 36th and 45th Divisions in an assault after 13 October.

Then the 3rd Division, after making a surprise shift in position from the south flank to the north, between the 45th and 36th, was to attack after 23 October toward St. Die from the northwest. The other two divisions would then continue to advance along the flanks, the 45th in the vicinity of Raon L'Etape and the 36th in the vicinity of La Houssiere. This drive was to be made in coordination with the XV Corps, advancing on Baccarat from the west and northwest, and with the French First Army, driving toward the Belfort Gap.

The Assault on Bruyeres

Bruyeres has good natural defenses. Southwest of Bruyeres is the Vologne River, which flows into the Moselle between Remiremont and Epinal, 20 to 35 feet wide with a number of main ditches, creating a marshy valley floor and restricting movement to the existing roads. All secondary roads leading south were easily blocked by trees. Buildings along the main road from Docelles to Bruyeres were either organized as strongpoints or strewn with mines and booby traps. The high ground northeast and west of Bruyeres was strongly held by German infantry supported by numerous pillboxes, antitank guns, automatic weapon emplacements, mined areas, and road blocks to make penetration difficult.

The plan of assault was for the 45th Division to sweep through Brouvelieures across the heights north of Bruyeres to approach Bruyeres from the north and northeast. The 36th Division was to attack from the southwest in the direction of Fays-Bruyeres. Attached to the 36th Division was the Nisei 442nd Infantry Regiment, which had just arrived from Italy, under the command of Colonel Charles W. Pence. It was to be in a central position protecting the left flank of the division while maintaining contact with the 45th. Included in the 442nd Regiment was the 100th Infantry Battalion which had received a Presidential Award for its service in Italy. The Nisei troops were to attack Bruyeres from the west. For the attack the 36th Division's artillery ammunition quota was increased by an additional allowance of 110 rounds per howitzer.

The attack on Bruyeres began at 0800 hours on 15 October after a 15 minute preparation by attached artillery units. Jumping off along the road leading from Fays to Bruyeres, the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 143rd Infantry, advanced abreast. Under the cover of smoke fired by 4.2 mortars from the 3rd Chemical Battalion, Companies I and K fought into the center of Laval on the road to Bruyeres. Company A pushed forward to cut the Bruyeres-Laval road, engaging in a fierce fire fight astride the railroad tracks. A heavy artillery duel continued throughout the day, as the Germans sought to break by heavy concentrations of mortar and artillery fire the regiment's hold on the approaches to Bruyeres.

By early morning on 16 October all resistance in Laval was mopped up by the 3rd Battalion, while the 1st Battalion cleared well-fortified houses on the Laval-Bruyeres road and along the railroad tracks. The 3rd Battalion resumed the attack and was stopped one mile south of Bruyeres by long range heavy artillery fire. On the morning of 17 October, the 1st Battalion was still occupied trying to clear the road from Laval to Bruyeres. Snipers and machine gunners stationed in houses prevented the removal of mines. Artillery fire finally routed them, and the 111th Engineers cleared the mines to permit passage of armor. Antitank fire from 57mm guns and .50 caliber machine gun fire were employed to give the impression that the main attack was to come from south of Bruyeres. Actually the main effort was to be made by the 442nd Infantry from the west.

At 0800 hours on 15 October the Japanese-Americans had launched an attack through the forest west of Bruyeres with the 100th and 2nd Battalions abreast and the 3rd Battalion in reserve. Heavy fire from prepared infantry positions in the thick woods forced the regiment to dig in. On 16 October Company F advanced to within 100 yards of Bruyeres and occupied Hill 555 (altitude in meters) northwest of the town. A counterattack stopped the advance at 1730 hours. The night of 16-17 October was spent under sporadic shelling. The wind was cold and drove before it a heavy rain. On the next day the Germans counter-attacked Hill 555 twice. Six bazooka teams were formed to meet enemy

armor, since 57mm antitank guns could not be brought into the forest. The enemy was driven back.

To the north of the 442nd, the 179th Infantry of the 45th Division, had also made an assault on 15 October. Heavy close-in infantry action forced the enemy from well dug-in positions in the dense woods. On 16 October after taking important high ground northwest of Bruyeres, the regiment continued the attack toward the Bruyeres-Brouvelieures highway.

On 18 October the 36th Division placed forty 37mm antitank guns south of Bruyeres; tanks were moved up; and smoke from 4.2 mortars was shot into the town. The 143rd Cannon Company threw in 300 rounds of supporting fire to wreck buildings protecting the enemy. By noon the 143rd Infantry had reached the factory area of Bruyeres and was mopping up in spite of a severe enemy mortar barrage. The Germans fought savagely, not even permitting regimental aid men to administer aid or evacuate the wounded. By 1600 hours the 1st Battalion moved under cover of a ridge to reach the road junction in the heart of Bruyeres.

Meanwhile the 442nd Infantry, after over eight hours of bitter fighting, cleared the heights to the northwest, and pushed into Bruyeres to engage in street fighting from house to house. By nightfall the town was under American control, although a barricaded group of Germans continued to resist in the center of town.

On 19 October the 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment, moved through Bruyeres and together with the 442nd completed the job of mopping up the town. The 179th to the north had cut the Bruyeres-Brouvelieures road. The enemy now began a continuous shelling of Bruyeres. House to house fighting together with this bombardment damaged or destroyed almost every building in the town. "Bruyeres will long be remembered", reported the 131st Field Artillery Battalion Journal, "for it was the most viciously fought for town we had encountered in our long march against the Germans. The enemy defended it house by house, giving up a yard, only when it became so untenable they could no longer hope to hold it."

The 45th Division Drive on Raon L'Etape

To the north of the 36th Division, the 45th Division was engaged in day-to-day limited objective attacks through densely wooded areas in a drive toward Raon L'Etape and the German Winter Line on the Meurthe. The fighting was chiefly against roadblocks of felled trees, and well coordinated strongpoints with all avenues of approach thoroughly mined and booby-trapped. Enemy counterattacks occurred daily. In villages the houses were converted into strongpoints and hard close-in fighting took place. Daily rains, cold weather, and continuous action increased difficulties of the drive.



CLEARING A GERMAN ROAD BLOCK

"... The fighting was chiefly against roadblocks of felled trees, well coordinated strong points with all avenues of approach thoroughly mined and booby trapped . . ."

On 1 October the 45th Division was extended along an eight mile front ranging from approximately ten miles east of Rambervillers south to Grandvillers. On the north the 157th Infantry was engaged in

the assault of the twin cities of Bru and Jeanmenil; in the center the 180th was meeting stubborn resistance on the outskirts of Fremifontaine; on the south the 179th was fighting from house to house in Grandvillers.

Grandvillers, northwest of Bruyeres, was taken on 2 October. Company B, 179th Infantry, attacked with tank support and cleared the eastern end of the town, while A and C Companies swept around the left flank to take high positions overlooking Grandvillers. Company B then finished clearing the town. On that day General Eagles, Divisional Commander, arrived at the Regimental Command Post to discuss the acute shortage of 105 mm and mortar ammunition and the possibility of resting troops as much as possible. Although these two factors limited operations for the next few weeks, the 179th assisted in the capture of Bruyeres by taking the hill mass to the north during the period 15-19 October.

After the fall of Bruyeres, the 179th moved north to take Brouvelieures. Strong enemy defenses were reported in the dense woods near the town. Following a heavy mortar and artillery preparation on 20 October all three battalions attacked, encountering enemy artillery and tank fire throughout the day. By noon elements of the 2nd Battalion broke through the enemy defenses on the left, then patrolled the slopes of the high ground overlooking the town, and set up positions from which the enemy could be observed. By 1500 hours, 21 October, the enemy began withdrawing northeast. Half an hour later the 2nd Battalion entered Brouvelieures with E Company coming from the left and G Company from the right. The Infantry finished clearing the town of snipers the following day. The regiment then pushed on across the Mortagne River to take the town of Mortagne by 24 October.

To the north of the 179th, the 180th Regiment was pushing from the Fremifontaine area to cross the Mortagne River and drive to the northeast. The advance was slow as the enemy fought back bitterly from firmly entrenched positions. By 1600 hours, 18 October, positions were organized 250 yards short of the river. On 20 October an attack was launched, breaking through the enemy's first line of trenches. Very close contact occasioned numerous grenade duels and small arms clashes,

but the enemy's wire entanglements finally halted the advance. The river was crossed on 22 October, but heavy fire from the east bank caused a withdrawal. At 0530 hours on 23 October the attack was resumed, and by 0745 hours the bulk of the 1st Battalion had crossed the river in spite of heavy machine gun fire. The bridgehead was secured and the advance continued northeast. On 30 October the 180th Infantry entered the town of St. Benoit, on the road to Raon L'Etape, without opposition.

On the northern flank the 157th Infantry made almost no progress during October following the taking of Rambervillers and the securing of positions overlooking Bru and Jeanmenil to the east. The enemy seemed determined to defend these two towns, located on roads leading to Raon L'Etape and the Meurthe River. Rain and cold increasingly hampered operations. Ammunition, particularly mortar and artillery, was rationed. Jeanmenil and Bru and the woods surrounding them were well defended strongholds. Chemical mortars were fired into Jeanmenil setting the town ablaze. The German observation post in the church steeple was finally battered to the ground by artillery fire. The towns were at last taken as a result of a drive east cutting the road from Jeanmenil to La Salle. The enemy withdrew from both towns which were occupied by American forces on 29 October.

3rd Division Pushes on St Die

On the right flank of the VI Corps the 3rd Division at the beginning of October occupied a zone of action from Rupt-sur-Moselle north through St. Ame, four miles east of Remiremont. The division was advancing on Gerardmer and the Schlucht Pass by the two highways through Le Tholy and Vagney. In the division center on the road to Le Tholy the 15th Infantry was held up at the beginning of October by the enemy firmly entrenched in an old quarry near Cleurie. Tanks had to be brought up to blast the rock road blocks. After five days of fighting a battle patrol entered the quarry on 5 October, suffering heavy casualties from enemy mortar and artillery fire. The regiment then continued northeast to positions about 400 yards west of Le Tholy.

South of the 15th Infantry, the 7th Infantry moved from the vicinity of St. Ame and opened its attack on Vagney on 4 October. Supported by tanks, the 3rd Battalion fought a bitter house to house battle and by morning of 7 October had gained complete control of the town. Sapois, two miles east, was taken on the next day.

On the division left flank the 30th Infantry endeavored to open a route to the southeast on the Tendon-Le Tholy road. On 6 October accurate fire succeeded in driving the enemy from positions astride the highway. The infantry advance slowed to a standstill, as the division prepared for another operation; meanwhile the artillery kept up the appearance of preparation for an assault. From 11 to 21 October every target on the approaches to Gerardmer was covered by artillery, chemical mortar, and .50 caliber machine gun fire.

During the early part of the month plans had been drawn for an assault to seize the southwest bank of the Meurthe River from St. Die north to Moyennmoutier. Prior to this assault the 45th Division was to drive to Brouvelieures while the 36th Division was to take Bruyeres. The 3rd Division was given the key role of taking the corps objective, the high ground near St. Die, in a surprise shift to the north. To accomplish this shift the division was to hold its position until relieved on corps order by French elements and by the 36th Division. The 3rd Division was to assemble in the rear of the 45th Division front, ready to attack on corps order by 23 October.

Surprise was vital in this operation. To deceive the enemy as to the direction of the corps attack a cover plan was to be carried out to give the enemy the idea that the attack was to be on Gerardmer from the Le Tholy area by elements of the 3rd and 36th Divisions and the French. It was hoped that the enemy would be contained on the Gerardmer front and would be unable to build up his forces against the main attack toward St. Die.

During the period 15-19 October the 3rd Division simulated a concentration west of Le Tholy while shifting strength to the north. 3rd Division radio nets continued operations in the Le Tholy area; the number and activity of combat patrols were increased; and dummy guns

were left in vacated positions. A dummy armored group radio net was to be opened at H-Hour in the Tendon-Le Tholy-Remiremont sector. The 36th Division increased patrols along the southern portion of its line



4.2 MORTARS FIRING IN THE LE THOLY AREA

" . . . The 3rd Division simulated a concentration west of Le Tholy while shifting strength to the north . . . "

and arranged for the "loss" of 3rd Division equipment on the front. VI Corps artillery increased cub plane activity on the right flank of the corps front 48 hours before the attack. The 3rd Division moved to its bivouac position south of Rambervillers in darkness, carefully camouflaging dumps, command installations, and gun positions. Reconnaissance parties wore 45th Division insignia. A period of several days was taken to register artillery by moving single guns to new positions in advance. There was radio silence.

On 20 October the 3rd Division attack lunged forward against only moderate resistance and made substantial progress. The enemy's

main line was cracked in the first 24 hours. Apparently tactical surprise had been achieved. The 30th Infantry, left behind in the Le Tholy area, reported the enemy alert in that sector. Troops of the 7th Infantry crossed the line of departure at noon, 20 October, and attacked toward Vervezelle, northeast of Bruyeres. After taking the town they advanced over open terrain to occupy Domfaing, on the Bruyeres-St. Die road. By 26 October Les Rouges Eaux had fallen, and the regiment proceeded along the road from Les Rouges Eaux to St. Die.

The 15th Infantry jumped off from a road junction immediately north of Bruyeres on 21 October, knocked out a strong enemy road block just south of Brouvelieures, and aided the 179th Regiment in the taking of the town. The attack continued northeast until commanding high ground was taken whereby artillery observers could bring fire on enemy vehicles and personnel in the villages of La Salle, La Bourgonce and Nompatelize.

The 30th Infantry left the Le Tholy area on 22 October and moved forward from Grandvillers on 24 October to follow the rest of the division through the forests along the Mortagne River. Pushing over narrow trails through heavily wooded, steep-sloped terrain typical of the Vosges, the regiment struck northeast through a gap in the enemy lines between Les Rouges Eaux and the La Salle valley. By 30 October the regiment had seized its objective, the dominating hill mass providing observation south from Rougiville to Taintrux and northeast toward St. Die. A salient had been driven into the enemy lines, 3,800 yards deep and 4,400 yards wide. Within this salient numerous high points provided excellent observation from which artillery could shell the roads of the Meurthe Valley. Limited objective attacks were now planned to drive all the enemy from the area west of St. Die and to secure the road net.

The enemy had waged a stubborn defense to stop the 30th Regiment in its advance east. In addition to the usual weapons and well organized defense positions, wire tapping agents, false radio messages, and false field messages were employed by the Germans. Several counterattacks attempted to drive the regiment from key terrain features. On 26 and 27 October the enemy had fired the greatest amount of artillery the regiment had yet experienced in a similar period of time

in France. Though the enemy had been caught unaware by the 3rd Division attack in strength and had lost control of his units for a time, by the end of the month he had once again fallen back to organized defense positions.



VOSGES MOUNTAINS OVERLOOKING MEURTHE VALLEY

" . . . Within this salient numerous high points provided excellent observation from which artillery could shell the roads of the Meurthe Valley . . ."

Despite the enemy's determined defense on the western fringe of the Vosges, VI Corps had finally succeeded during the month of October in breaking through rough mountain terrain to seize the high ground dominating the Meurthe River Valley in the St. Die area. More than 5,000 prisoners were taken during the month.

The "Lost" Battalion

At 0845 hours, 23 October, General Dahlquist of the 36th Division had directed the 141st Infantry to send a patrol of company or battalion strength to work along a trail through the Forêt Domaniale

de Champ, east of Bruyeres, and to secure the heights north of the village of La Houssiere. The 1st Battalion, which had been assigned the mission, moved into the forest before noon and by nightfall had lost contact with the regiment. Germans had overrun the battalion command post, driving back the headquarters personnel and the battalion staff.

On 25 October the 2nd Battalion, 141st Infantry, tried to open a supply route to the men who were cut off but could get no closer than 1,200 yards, as the enemy was covering the trail with machine guns and artillery. An enemy observation post and radio party located in the forest directed artillery fire on every vehicle attempting to move up the trail. The forward elements of the 1st Battalion were now about one mile north of La Houssiere and were engaged with enemy forces that kept infiltrating into their positions. It now appeared that the combat elements of the battalion, 240 men, under the command of 1st Lieutenant Martin J. Higgins Jr. of Company A, senior officer with the group, were cut off except for radio communication with a forward artillery observer.

That evening the Nisei 442nd Infantry Regiment was alerted to come to the rescue of the "lost" battalion. The Japanese-Americans, after the assault on Bruyeres, had been engaged since 19 October clearing the area to the northeast of Bruyeres and east to Biffontaine. At 1400 hours, 25 October, the 2nd Battalion, 442nd Infantry, was ordered to prepare to attack east toward the 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment; the following day the Nisei 100th and 3rd Battalions were alerted to attack. The isolated troops were now short of supplies and had suffered casualties.

Until relief of the 1st Battalion could be effected, efforts were being made to supply the cut-off elements both by air drops and by artillery. The first drop, attempted at 1100 hours, 27 October, by four planes of the 371st Fighter Bomber Group, failed because of bad weather. One plane was lost. On the following two days, rations, ammunition, plasma, and radio batteries were dropped with limited success. Because of a heavy ground fog, part of the supplies were dropped out of the battalion area; one plane was shot down by friendly ack-ack. On 30 October a radio message from the "lost" battalion requested that no

additional plane drops be made which might give away the battalion's position. The 131st Field Artillery Battalion attempted to fire medical supplies and chocolate bars to the infantry. Shells used for propaganda leaflets were lobbed in by 105mm and 155mm howitzers. Only fractional success was obtained as the shells buried themselves in the soft ground.

By the second day of separation most of the attention of the surrounding units was devoted to direct relief of the isolated troops. At 1030 hours on 26 October the commanders of VI Corps and the 36th Division arrived at the 141st Regimental Command Post to survey and discuss the problem. The Division Commander ordered the Regimental Commander to have the 1st Battalion attack immediately to the west to break out of the encirclement and to avoid the stalemate that was developing. At 1312 hours a message came from the 1st Battalion stating that contact had been made with the enemy at three different points. At 1345 hours the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 141st Infantry, were ordered to continue the push through the woods to open the trail.

On 27 October the 1st Battalion reported "morale high", although the men were physically weak. Four men were reported killed, 28 wounded or ill, and 43 missing from the combat patrol which had led the attack to break out of the encirclement. By this time the Nisei troops were approaching. On the afternoon of 29 October the Division Commander sent a message to the "lost" battalion stating that the 442nd was pushing through to approximately 700 yards of the unit and ordered patrols sent out to contact the Nisei unit. The lieutenant in command of the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, replied that a patrol would require a large force of men and that, since the loss of his first patrol, men could not be spared. German patrols were active and a counterattack believed imminent. The group now had 22 litter cases, 11 trench foot cases, and 10 walking wounded.

The 442nd Infantry attack moved slowly against small arms and automatic weapons fire. Along the route were numerous road blocks, mine fields, and well prepared positions. General Dahlquist ordered the 442nd to push ahead at all cost to reach the "lost" battalion. Savage hand-to-hand fighting took place, as the men charged machine gun nests with bayonets and grenades. After killing scores of Germans, the

infantry broke through the major road blocks. A tank dozer arrived to remove the obstructions in order that tanks might advance and support the infantry.

On 30 October a heavy artillery and mortar concentration was laid down on the ridge separating the 442nd from the "lost battalion", and at 0900 hours both battalions again attacked. The heavy losses inflicted on the enemy in the previous fighting resulted in lightened resistance; good progress was made. At 1600 hours the long awaited radio message from the "lost" battalion came over the air, "Patrol from the 442nd here. Tell them we love them." The isolated unit had been



**JAPANESE-AMERICANS FIRING THE 105MM HOWITZER
IN THE VOSGES FORESTS**

"... On 30 October a heavy artillery and mortar concentration was laid down on the ridge separating the 442nd from the 'lost battalion' ..."

reached by advanced patrols of the 3rd Battalion, 442nd Infantry. The 3rd Battalion dug in on a hill top around the relieved unit, while the 100th Battalion moved up on the right flank. The division commander

ordered the "lost" battalion wounded to be removed during the night and the remainder of the unit the next morning.

Although press reports stated that the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry, was cut off and referred to isolated elements as the "lost" battalion, the battalion was never actually surrounded by the enemy in force. The supply lines were cut by enemy infiltration in the dense woods, but at no time was the unit heavily engaged.

On 7 November General White, Seventh Army Chief of Staff, discussed with Sixth Army Group the matter of relief of the 442nd Infantry. The Nisei troops had undergone 15 days of hard fighting in wet and freezing weather from Bruyeres to the "lost" battalion. This had cost the regiment during October 117 killed in action, 657 wounded in action, 40 missing in action, a total of 814 casualties. Many others were suffering from respiratory diseases and trench foot. It was believed that the climate on the flank along the Riviera would be more suitable for them.

The Introduction of New Divisions

As the month of November opened, VI Corps was confronted with three problems: first, to bring the corps right and left flanks up to the salient held by the 3rd Division along the Meurthe, thus straightening a "jump" line for another offensive; second, to introduce the newly arrived 100th and 103rd Infantry Divisions into combat; and third, to make final plans and regroup the entire corps for an attack to cross the Meurthe, to crack the German Winter Line, to penetrate the Vosges passes, and to reach the Rhine.

On 27 September the Seventh Army Chief of Staff had announced the assignment of the 100th and 103rd Infantry Divisions and the 14th Armored Division arriving from the United States. It had been planned that the 100th Division would be sent to VI Corps and the 103rd Division to XV Corps, that both would be battle-seasoned by the attachment of their regiments to experienced divisions for first commitment. Once these new divisions were in full operation, one division of each corps in Seventh Army could be rotated in reserve. However, it was decided by 3 November to send the 103rd as well as the 100th Division to the VI Corps initially. The new divisions had arrived in

Marseille during October. They were staged and equipped by Base Section, then rapidly moved north to the army area.

At the time of the arrival of these fresh troops the left flank of VI Corps was advancing slowly northeast over forested terrain toward Raon L'Etape. The corps center occupied the Vosges ridges dominating the Meurthe River Valley just west of St. Die. The right flank was moving through the Foret Domaniale de Champ toward Corcieux and the Meurthe River south of St. Die.

The 100th Division arrived in the VI Corps sector only eleven days after debarking from its convoy at Marseille and was assigned the mission of relieving the 45th Division in the vicinity of St. Remy-St. Benoit-Baccarat on the northern sector of the corps by 9 November. The veteran division was to give as much aid as possible in matters of bivouac, assembly areas, available cover and shelter, routes, enemy intelligence, and standard operating procedure in the corps. All possible security measures would be used to insure the secrecy of this relief.

The Century Division, composed of the 397th, 398th and 399th Infantry Regiments and commanded by Major General Withers A.



MAJOR GENERAL
WITHERS A. BURRESS
*"...protecting the corps left
flank..."*

Burress took over the 45th Division's mission of protecting the corps left flank and of advancing to the high ground near Raon L'Etape. As relief of the 45th Division was being accomplished, that division reverted to army control, moved to a rest area, and was held in readiness to re-enter the line as part of XV Corps. On 9 November the 100th Division was first committed to combat and encountered the same cold, rainy, muddy conditions that were plaguing other troops. On 10 November the 398th Infantry pushed forward toward the Meurthe River in the vicinity of Etival Clairefontaine, meeting only scattered resistance. There were indications that the enemy was withdrawing to the

eastern bank. Amid a flurry of the winter's first snow the 100th Division

jumped off on its first full-scale attack at 0900 hours, 12 November. The 397th and 399th Infantry Regiments moved out of their positions at Baccarat, which had been recently taken by the 2nd French Armored Division, and headed eastward across the Meurthe River. The plan of attack called for the 399th to move to locations just west and south of Neuf-Maisons, a town east of Baccarat and north of Raon L'Etape, to block German movement from the Raon L'Etape area. The 397th Infantry was to send one battalion down the Meurthe River toward Raon L'Etape, while another moved between Neuf-Maisons and the river directly toward the division objective, the high ground north of Raon L'Etape. South of the river the 398th Infantry and the 100th Reconnaissance Troop were to hold the line and on division order to place diversionary fires on the town with 50 calibre machine guns, 57mm guns, and mortars. During the day the infantry advance ran into considerable small arms and artillery fire but was held up even more by rain, snow, and density of the woods. On 13 November the Germans counterattacked in strength. The 374th Field Artillery Battalion and the 69th Armored Field Artillery Battalion laid down a five minute barrage on the area, killing 75 Germans, and dispersed the counter-attack.

Troops of the 100th Division on 15 November broke through the first real German defensive positions they had encountered. The 397th Infantry was stopped by prepared positions from Raon L'Etape to Neuf-Maisons. The 3rd Battalion of the 399th Regiment swung south from the vicinity of Neuf-Maisons to take commanding heights in the rear of the German defenses, thereby cracking the line. The 1st Battalion of the 399th moved rapidly south astride the Neuf-Maisons-Raon L'Etape road to just north of Raon L'Etape. The rest of the division was now in position to assault the town.

On 17 November regrouping and reorganization took place in preparation for an attack the next day toward the high ground southeast of Raon L'Etape. The 398th Regiment had been moved north to cross the Meurthe River at Baccarat and to come into line with the other regiments for the divisional assault. On 18 November the 397th Infantry pushed through the town of Raon L'Etape along the river, only to be

stopped at the outskirts by Germans entrenched in a stone quarry. The 398th Infantry attacked across the Plaine River near La Trouche but were able to get only one company to the south side against determined opposition. The next day the rest of the 398th crossed the river and occupied positions commanding the road and valley southeast of Raon L'Etape. To the north the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, attacked, and the 100th Reconnaissance Troop occupied Neuf-Maisons, Pexonne, and Badonwiller without opposition. The securing of the high ground around Raon L'Etape neutralized this bastion of the German Winter Line.



MAJOR GENERAL
EDWARD H. BROOKS
*"...new commander
of VI Corps..."*

the 100th Division for its part in the advance. General Brooks, formerly commander of the American V Corps, had officially assumed command of VI Corps on 25 October, when General Truscott was ordered to report to the Twelfth Army Group for further assignment. The letter of commendation to General Burress hailed the capture of Raon L'Etape as an operation which "breached the hinge of the German defensive position and at the same time drew forces from the center where the main attack was to be made."



MAJOR GENERAL
CHARLES C. HAFFNER JR.
*"...entered combat... west of
St. Die..."*

During the month of November the 103rd Division also entered combat for the first time, in a sector some four miles west of St. Die. This division, commanded by Major General Charles C. Haffner, Jr., was made up of the 409th, the 410th, and the 411th Infantry Regiments.

During the period 10-15 November the division dug in at the front between the 3rd and 36th Divisions and the men were gradually acclimated to battle conditions; patrols were active, mines were swept, information was secured from prisoners, troops inured to artillery fire, and supply problems mastered.

The 103rd Division Field Order No. 1, issued on 15 November, directed an attack to seize and hold wooded high ground southwest of St. Die. H-Hour was 0900, 16 November. At H minus 15 all available division and corps artillery began a 15-minute preparation. In less than three hours Hill 623 (altitude in meters), the forward point of a triangular



SCORCHED EARTH

" . . . During the first week of combat the 103rd Division witnessed the new German 'scorched earth' policy, especially evident in the St. Die sector . . . "

mountain objective, was taken and the woods north and east of Taintrux entered. By 17 November the division had consolidated its objective, the hill mass looking directly down on St. Die from the southwest.

During this first week of combat the 103rd Division witnessed the new German "scorched earth", policy, especially evident in the St. Die sector but extending all along the VI Corps front. On 8 November Gestapo Headquarters at St. Die received orders from General Heckel to form arson and demolition squads capable of destroying and burning as ordered all towns and villages in the path of the German withdrawal. An organized program of evacuation, burning, looting, and destruction began on 10 November. On 11 November women, children, and the aged were evacuated from that part of St. Die north of the Meurthe River. The people were told that the Americans intended to fire-bomb St. Die and that the Germans wanted to save their lives. All able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45 had previously been sent to Strasbourg. During 11 and 12 November soldiers systematically looted the evacuated area.

At 1200 hours on 13 November the enemy began burning St. Die by first burning the home of Monsieur Duminel, local pharmacist. On the wall of his home there was a plaque, commemorating the fact that St. Die sent the first shipload of men and supplies from France to the United States during the American Revolution. The other buildings were then destroyed in turn. Both gasoline and incendiary bombs were used to start the fires, and smaller charges of dynamite were used to destroy machinery in local plants.

On the night of 17-18 November a patrol of the 410th Infantry entered St. Die; and from reports of civilians and agents it was learned that 90 percent of the buildings in the northern half of St. Die had been burned and dynamited, crowding 27,000 persons in the southeastern portion of the city. The area between the Meurthe River and a line enclosing Moyenmoutier, St. Jean d'Ormont, Nayemont and Provencheres came under the torch as well. Towns to the south were similarly destroyed: Corcieux, St. Leonard, Ste Marguerite, and Gerardmer. Fortunately the rapid advance in that sector prevented complete destruction. For a long time the sector was to be remembered as a place where "the enemy reached a new low in vicious warfare."

VI Corps Reaches the Meurthe Winter Line

On the 3rd Division sector in the VI Corps line the enemy counterattacked at the beginning of November with fanatical fury, as he realized that the division's position overlooking St. Die and the Meurthe River Valley constituted a serious threat to his plans to defend on the eastern bank of the river. Two new well-equipped mountain battalions were thrown into the battle for several days without success. After realizing the impossibility of dislodging the Americans from the high ground, the enemy organized defensive positions to contain them.



WRECKED GERMAN EQUIPMENT ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF
LA BOURGONCE

"... the 15th Infantry thrust itself into La Bourgonce and established a foothold in the valley . . ."

The 15th Infantry had reached the high ground overlooking the La Salle-Nompatelize-Etival-St. Michel area on the west bank of the Meurthe north of St. Die. Its plan was now to pivot so as to bring

the regiment against the west bank of the river by driving north, thus taking these towns in the valley. In a surprise attack the last night of October the 2nd Battalion, 15th Infantry, spearheaded by E Company, thrust itself into La Bourgonce and established a foothold in the valley. Company F then moved unopposed into Nompatelize; and, after an intensive preparation of fire, the battalion attacked and occupied La Salle. The 3rd Battalion then moved on Etival from the south in a coordinated attack with the 2nd Battalion from the west. By 1900 hours, 10 November, the town was completely cleared. The regimental line was then extended to the railroad on the west bank of the Meurthe.

The 7th Infantry Regiment was engaged in clearing the Forêt de Mortagne north of the Brouvelieures-St. Die road. Good natural defenses and miserable weather made the regiment's problem a difficult one. On 4 November the regiment launched an all-out assault. The attack was aided by an intensive artillery program called a "Joe Louis" which was fired four times, expending over 1400 rounds. The regiment pushed eastward along the St. Die highway, sending out aggressive patrols which reached into Rougville. Between the other two regiments the 30th Infantry was engaged in clearing the perimeter defenses of the Mortagne Forest.

After the 103rd Division had entered the line, the 15th Infantry Regiment was left to hold the 3rd Division front, while the other two regiments were pulled out for a program of rehabilitation and training in preparation for a key role in the Seventh Army's November offensive. There was special emphasis on the technique of river crossing. Reconnaissance of crossing sites on the Meurthe River was made, plans discussed, and staff preparations completed. There was continuous patrolling, and listening posts were established on the banks of the river to pick up enemy activity and movement. Training was given in small unit problems in the reduction of pillboxes and fortified houses and attack through woods. H-Hour for the VI Corps part of the new Seventh Army offensive was set for 0645 on 20 November.

On the Corps right flank, in the meantime, the 36th Division had been given the mission of maintaining contact with the First French Army and driving along the Bruyeres-Corcieux axis toward the Meurthe.

At the beginning of November, the 141st Regiment had been fighting in the forest east of Bruyeres against stubborn resistance. It then pushed south to guard the right flank and maintain contact with the French.



**3RD DIVISION MEN CROSSING THE MORTAGNE RIVER
IN TRAINING EXERCISE**

" . . . There was special emphasis on the technique of river crossing in preparation for the Seventh Army's November offensive . . . "

By 1330 hours of 18 November Companies I and L, after a drive through heavily mined woods, had reached a point overlooking Gerardmer and Lake Gerardmer. Patrols found that the town had been a victim of the "scorched earth" policy of the Germans and that only a few buildings were intact. The greater portion of the city consisted of rubble and scorched walls, which were mined and booby-trapped.

The 142nd Infantry had the mission of driving down the narrow valley from Les Rouges Eaux in a southeasterly direction to reach the Meurthe. The valley has a narrow flat bed with an open clearing 200-

400 yards wide running through it and the eastern part of the densely wooded Foret Domaniale de Champ. Only a few houses dot the single valley road, on both sides of which the ground rises sharply. For tac-



WEATHER WAS BAD: RAIN, MIST AND SNOW

"... On the sixth and seventh days of fighting 'a blanket of wet snow whitened the ground and hung on the tree limbs to make a pretty picture but not the kind to fight a war in' ..."

tical reasons the open ground had to be avoided, and regimental troops pushed up and down over numerous ridges under cover of the woods. Movement was slow. Fighting was often from tree to tree. Tree bursts from artillery fire had a terrifying effect. The weather was bad: rain, mist, and snow. There were many casualties from exposure, particularly trench foot. On the sixth and seventh days of fighting "a blanket of wet snow whitened the ground and hung on the tree limbs to make a pretty picture but not the kind to fight a war in." Rain severely limited employment of air support, while soggy ground in the valley and flatlands confined armor to the roads and restricted artillery emplacements.

In the regimental drive down the valley from 4 to 12 November casualties were heavy; 41 were killed in action, 3 died of wounds, 235 were wounded in action, 7 were missing in action, and there were 345



THE LES ROUGES EAUX VALLEY

"... Soggy ground in the valley and flatlands confined armor to the roads and restricted artillery emplacements . . ."

non-battle casualties. Stiff resistance was encountered by the 142nd Infantry until the 3rd Battalion captured the enemy observation post from which the Germans were directing fire on the entire valley to Les Rouges Eaux. On 10 November troops entered Vanemont and La Housiere and cleared these villages at the southeastern end of the valley.

This action was a "turning point" for the regiment "that may be likened to reaching the crest of a hill and starting on a downrun." For over a month it had been fighting almost static warfare. On 10 November a weakening of the enemy became apparent, and the line began to surge forward. On 14 November patrols from the 1st Battalion

went nearly to Corcieux before they made contact with the enemy. Early in the evening of the next day the glare of fires appeared on the horizon. The German torch was being set to Corcieux. The next night Barbey-Seroux was in flames. Patrols entered Corcieux the night of 17-18 November as the 142nd Infantry moved up to the center of the divisional line, just north of 141st Infantry positions at Gerardmer. The division now had good observation over the Meurthe River Valley.

At the beginning of November the 143rd Regiment likewise encountered stiff resistance which later moderated. Heavy artillery fire was used against the enemy before the regiment made its advance. On 3 November artillery fire was supplemented by a platoon of tanks engaged in harassing fire, while cannon company fired 1,000 rounds of 50 caliber and 80 rounds of 75mm ammunition. On 5 November flak wagons, mortars, machine guns, and antitank guns were used against the enemy. Prisoners told of the effectiveness of these tactics; enemy supply and ration deliveries had been disrupted for several days. Night attacks proved effective against the Germans who were in the habit of occupying hill defensive positions during the day and sleeping in the towns at night.

The 143rd Regiment advanced slowly from positions near Bruyeres directly to the east, as the other two regiments passed to the south to take up their positions on the new front. Troops of the 143rd Infantry, moving through the hills to avoid mined roads, had by 19 November come up to positions along the Meurthe River at St. Leonard and Anould. Here regimental patrols operated on the division's left flank to secure information on potential crossings of the Meurthe. Patrols reported that the river was between 75 and 100 yards wide, six feet deep in the center, and had a very swift current. Plans for 20 November called for a crossing at St. Leonard and Anould.

On 19 November four divisions were lined up on the VI Corps front against the Germans' Meurthe River defenses. To the north the 100th Division had already crossed the river at Baccarat and was in position from Badonviller south to Raon L'Etape. The 3rd Division was in line on the western banks of the Meurthe from Etival through St. Michel. In the St. Die sector along the Meurthe River was the 103rd

Division, and from St. Leonard south to Gerardmer were the troops of the 36th Division.

By 20 November, when VI Corps was ready to jump off on its mission in the Seventh Army offensive which was aimed at Strasbourg, significant developments had already taken place both to the north and to the south. XV Corps had launched its part of the offensive on 13 November and by 20 November was achieving a major breakthrough at Saverne. An offensive by the First French Army in the south had broken through the Belfort Gap. These events were to contribute to the VI Corps offensive through the Vosges passes, although the enemy continued to resist every thrust by American forces.

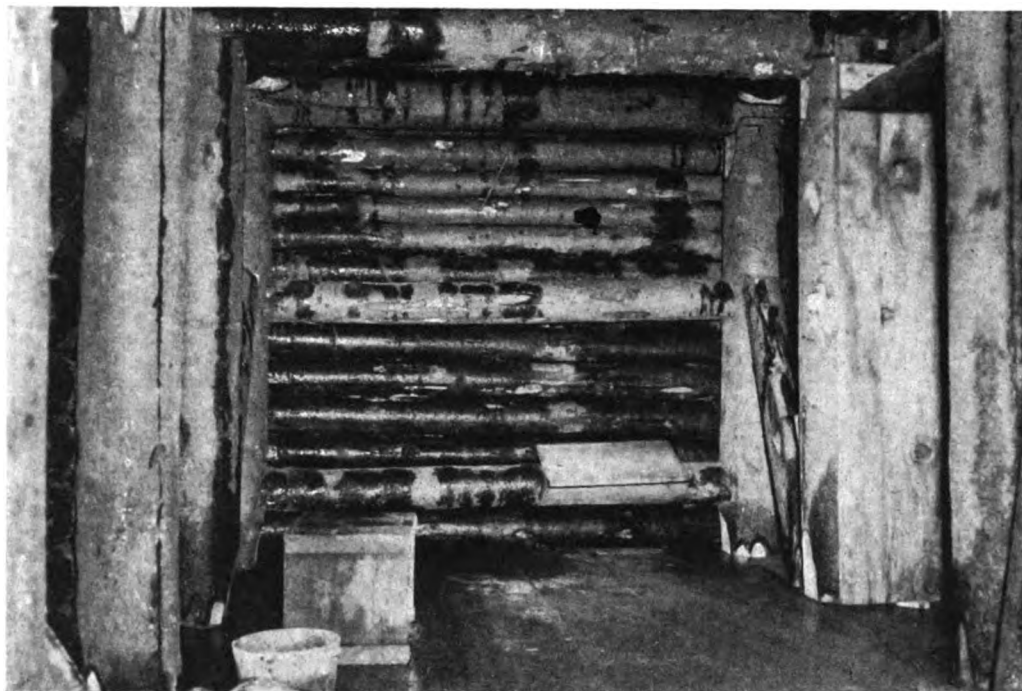
Vosges Warfare

Fighting in the Vosges was characterized by the plugging advances of the infantry, the innovations in tactics of supporting troops, and the desperation of the enemy. Progress of the VI Corps in the Vosges foothills had been slow, limited, and somewhat discouraging in comparison with the seven-league advances from the Riviera beaches. During half of August and the month of September troops had come 400 miles from St. Raphael to Rambervillers. During October and half of November the advance was 15 miles. The battle on the Vosges front was no less significant; and, if less spectacular, it was the more bitterly engaged.

For the infantry, combat in the woods was in many ways comparable to jungle fighting. Maintenance of direction was particularly difficult, leading to erroneous reports as to location of units and enemy positions. Orders based on inaccurate information at times resulted in bitter and unexpected fighting. The compass was in almost continuous use. Fighting at night became impossible unless enemy positions were known beforehand. Otherwise such disorganization resulted that it took hours after daylight to get the men together again.

Advancing in the woods, foot soldiers found that the enemy allowed them to come up so close that friendly artillery could not be employed. Experiment proved it better to have a force in front of the

main body to draw enemy fire. Attacking through forested terrain, the individual rifleman hardly ever saw his target. The enemy was so well hidden that when he fired only the general direction of his position could



INTERIOR OF AN EMPTY DUGOUT IN THE VOSGES

"... Small, dug-in enemy detachments, if not cleared out, would harass supply columns ..."

be located. In addition, the infantry squad leader could see only two or three men of the squad at once, so that it was difficult to bring the fire of his squad to bear on any one point. Tommy guns, grenade launchers, and bazookas were found useful under these circumstances. Forest sectors had to be mopped up thoroughly. Small, dug-in enemy detachments, if not cleared out, would harass supply columns. Skirmish lines were sent to "drag" an area by-passed by an infantry attack.

In the Vosges it was necessary to give extra care to the organization of positions for defense. Troops dug deep fox-holes, covering them over for protection against artillery fire. Dugouts where

groups of men could get warm and dry were also built. Possible lanes of enemy approach were covered by 50 caliber machine guns in positions frequently protected by barbed wire.



COVERING A SHELTER DUGOUT FOR PROTECTION
AGAINST ARTILLERY FIRE

" . . . Troops dug deep fox-holes, covering them over for protection against artillery fire, and built dugouts where groups of men could get warm and dry . . . "

Regimental patrolling was so extensive that it became the main combat action during much of the period of static warfare. It was kept sufficiently aggressive to hold the enemy along the front in expectation of a full scale attack. Patrolling also felt out the enemy's weak points, his strong points, and his intentions. Raiding parties and regular patrols often inflicted on the enemy severe casualties which sapped his strength. Constant patrolling prevented unnecessary deployment for attack on an already abandoned position, the Germans frequently breaking contact to man stronger defenses. It was vital that

ground abandoned be occupied immediately, or the enemy would be given a chance to reorganize and move back into positions more favorable to his situation.

The strain of hard fighting and the exposure to continuous rain and cold had their effects on the troops. Tree bursts from enemy artillery took a heavy toll and gave the men a certain feeling of helplessness. When caught in attack formation or without overhead cover during a barrage, the troops suffered fewer casualties when they stood upright against trees rather than hit the ground. Respiratory diseases, intestinal disorders, trench foot, and exhaustion cases increased, in some organizations more than doubled, during October. Trench foot became a major problem. It increased in the 3rd Division from 54 in September to 160 in October to 448 in November. Whenever possible battalions took their turns out of the lines for the rest and rehabilitation of the troops. In spite of the difficulties they faced, infantrymen plugged on for their yard by yard gains in the Vosges.

Supporting arms and services found it necessary to improvise to give maximum assistance to the advance. Artillerymen found tactics in the Vosges different from those in open country. Adjustments by sound, at times as close as 100 yards from the target, became the rule rather than the exception. Shortage of ammunition limited artillery support and slowed the advance, for even moderate concentrations of artillery and mortar fire would bring many German soldiers into the American lines to surrender. "Ammunition for our battalion was so limited," reports the 131st Field Artillery Battalion for October, "that if we had been permitted, we could have fired the entire ten days' ration in ten minutes. Such slow shooting was annoying to our cannoneers who remember Cassino, where in one day over 6,000 rounds had been fired."

There was much experimentation to make the most effective use of artillery in the dense forest. The use of delay fuze proved effective, but a combination of quick and delay fuze on concentrations was used most often. Adjustment of fire was difficult. Ground observers had limited visibility, while air observers required white phosphorous smoke shells of which there was a critical shortage. The best procedure

seemed to be to make precision check point adjustments on open ground and then to use these data to transfer fire to the target area. Other experimentation was made to increase the mobility of artillery from position to position.

Armor could give the infantry only limited support. Tanks lost their maneuverability in the steep and wooded terrain of the Vosges and bogged down even on the shoulders of roads, softened by continuous rain; cross country operations were precluded for the most part. Tanks were vulnerable to enemy rocket fire from concealed positions at close range and easily ambushed at night. Noise of tanks drew down enemy



TANK DESTROYERS SERVING AS ARTILLERY

“ . . . Tanks and tank destroyers occupied firing positions on high ridges and fired jointly on enemy vehicles or personnel which exposed themselves below . . . ”

artillery fire, and their own fire frequently had a more disturbing effect on friendly than on enemy troops.

Tactical armor was used as an addition to artillery for the

support of an infantry attack. After a road had been taken and swept by the engineers, tanks would follow up in support. Tanks and tank destroyers occupied firing positions on high ridges and fired jointly on enemy vehicles or personnel which exposed themselves below. Track extensions were provided to assist operation in boggy terrain. The medium extension improved mobility, but the light extension was practically worthless. Tank destroyers were extremely vulnerable and of little value to the infantry as a close support weapon in the Vosges fighting. They were difficult to maneuver, and their field of fire was negligible. Tank dozers were used in the herculean job of removing



ENGINEERS SHOVEL TO KEEP THE ROADS OPEN

"... Engineers during October and November worked to keep open communications and supply roads to front line regiments . . ."

antitank obstacles and blocks placed by the enemy on nearly every road and trail.

Engineers during October and November worked to keep open communication and supply roads to front line regiments. Under heavy

rains, roads were immediately broken down even by light vehicles. Rubble from smashed stone buildings was found useful in road repair. Lumber or poles placed crossways on roads served as a base and cushion under several inches of gravel.

The laying of wire in wooded areas tested the ingenuity of communications men. Linemen had to work in groups of two or more, always on the alert for enemy patrols or ambushes. Enemy patrols frequently cut wire lines and waited for linemen to come up to make repairs. It was better to lay a new line, several hundred yards to the flank. Military Police platoons sent carrier pigeons from traffic control posts to the division pigeon lofts with hourly dispatches of weather, road conditions, and traffic. Innovations of all infantry support troops contributed to the final success of the Vosges campaign.

The enemy fought desperately in the foothills of the Vosges and did succeed in gaining time to complete defense preparations on approaches to the fatherland. Backed up by a prepared line in the Vosges hills and forests the Germans showed that they had lost little of their ability to exploit favorable terrain to the fullest. Mountains and forests went far to make up the enemy's deficiency in men, material, and morale. On a stable front shortage of motor transport was no longer his great problem. German troops, below the standard of the past, proved "that even a 4-F can fire a gun from a well-sited position."

When American troops pushed forward during October and November, there was heavy fighting, each advance drawing sharp reactions and counterattacks; but on a quiet front the enemy was generally content to let it remain quiet. His purpose was clear; to gain time to prepare an extensive and elaborate winter defense line along the western slopes of the Vosges. This policy may have proved disastrous; his troops to man these defenses were being decimated and worn out.

All available troops were usually committed in the face of strong probing actions. It was estimated that the enemy had 13,700 troops of diverse units to defend the Vosges mountains. This force was to be considered expendable and to sell the land for as high a price in time and attrition as possible.

The enemy attempted to break down the morale of American troops. By public address systems he addressed units by name, gave details of their history, compared the lot of the front line soldier with rear echelon service troops and 4-Fs in the United States, and exhorted the doughboys to surrender. At the same time the morale of his own troops was none too good. Prisoners interrogated pointed to bad health, poor food, continuous commitment, lack of medical attention, propaganda pamphlets, difficult terrain, bad weather, and insufficient clothing as reasons for their low morale. Interrogators got a picture of a tired enemy continuing to commit weary, dispirited troops in a desperate bid for time. Soldiers who came to the front fresh from Germany had often a rude awakening when exposed to Allied superiority in artillery, aircraft, and armor.

Although the enemy's facilities for supplying his troops were far from satisfactory, he enjoyed several advantages he did not have in the summer and early fall. The short haul from factory to consumer reduced both the time involved in tying up transports and the time in which transports were vulnerable to air attack. His lines of communications were now more secure than when he was making long hauls through hostile country. The lack of available flying days served as a protection against Allied air attacks.

October and early November were a period of preparation for future action, both the Americans and Germans using the period to regroup and resupply for the more decisive battles to come. The attacks of the Seventh Army in the Forest of Parroy and the western Vosges fitted into the scheme, for they had the purpose of depriving the enemy of his forward defensive positions and pushing him back on his main line of resistance even before the opening of the November offensive. This purpose was achieved. The staff of Seventh Army in Epinal planned and gave orders for the execution of the combined maneuver to take Strasbourg on the Rhine. As VI Corps prepared to press through the Vosges passes on its long front, XV Corps was already pointing the weight of its forces toward the Saverne Gap.

CHAPTER XVII

Maneuver for Strasbourg

A Seventh Army directive dated 5 November opened the November offensive. The mission was stated in simple terms: the Seventh Army attacks on D-Day; destroys enemy in zone west of the Rhine; captures



**GENERAL VIEW OF STRASBOURG. IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE
BLACK FOREST, IN THE CENTER OF THE PICTURE CAN BE SEEN
THE RHINE RIVER**

*" . . . The Seventh Army attacks on D-Day; destroys enemy in zone west of Rhine; captures
Strasbourg and maintains contact with right flank of Twelfth Army Group . . . "*

Strasbourg and maintains contact with right flank of Twelfth Army Group. The VI Corps was to continue present operations, introduce to combat the 100th and 103rd Divisions, and to attack not later than D plus 2 on the axis St. Die-Strasbourg. The XV Corps, maintaining active, close contact with the enemy, was to attack on D-Day, capture and secure Sarrebourg, thereafter to force the Saverne Gap and be prepared to exploit east of the Vosges. It was at that time planned that the 45th Division would be relieved on the VI Corps front, revert to army control, and be released to the XV Corps when operations required its use. This plan for the Seventh Army November offensive was one part of the larger picture of Allied operations in France.

During the months of September and October the German armed forces had continued to reinforce their defenses in the west, particularly along the Westwall, so as to deny the Allies entry into Germany proper. The enemy's main concentrations were found in front of and to the west of the Saar, and more particularly the Ruhr regions. He was also sensitive to any Allied threat against the Belfort approaches to the upper Rhine Valley. The German Army hoped to preserve complete freedom of movement along the entire length of the Rhine.

To the north, the Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force, sent one army group against the Ruhr. In the center of the front the Twelfth Army Group was to conduct operations against the enemy in the Saar. The Sixth Army Group in the south, including the First French and American Seventh Armies, was to act aggressively against the enemy west of the Rhine who still held the focal territory of Alsace. All army groups were to prepare to strike blows deep into Germany itself. The Seventh Army route of advance pointed toward Bavaria.

At the end of October the Seventh Army occupied a zone from the Rhine-Marne Canal east of Luneville south to positions in the foothills of the Vosges between Remiremont on the Moselle and Gerardmer at the headwaters of the Meurthe. On its northern flank the American Third Army was directing its forces against the fortresses of Metz, which would have to be overcome before any general advance could be made to the east. As the Seventh Army pushed farther to the east than the Third, it would offer full protection to the right flank of

the Third Army but would have to provide its own protection for its own left flank. On the southern flank of the Seventh Army the First French Army was already probing for openings into the German-held Belfort Gap. Combined operations by these two components of Sixth Army Group would be required to sweep the enemy from Alsatian plains. The selection of the Seventh Army as the chief tactical unit to penetrate the Alsatian Plain was dictated by geographical considerations.

Terrain and Tactics

The normal avenue of approach to the plain of Alsace from the southwest or the west is through the Belfort Gap. This geographical depression, the ancient Gate of Burgundy, is the great trade route joining the Rhine and Rhone Valleys by canal, by rail, and by highway. However, this gap or gate is but 15 miles wide at its narrowest point and lies between the commanding peaks of the High Vosges on the north and the Jura Alps on the south. A force advancing northeast through the Belfort Gap toward the upper Rhine would be almost continually anchored against the Swiss frontier. But the left and center of this advancing force, even after breaking through the heavy German defenses southwest of the town of Belfort, would still remain under direct observation and fire from the high peaks of the Vosges along the northwest side of the corridor. Once the advance northeast through the Belfort Gap had been completed, the direction of movement would of necessity have to turn north down the Rhine Valley, since the Vosges on the west bank and the Black Forest on the east bank restrict the width of the Alsatian Plain to an average of from 15 to 20 miles. The Black Forest with its rough hills and extensive woods would not make a favorable military entrance into Germany. In this area on the east bank of the Rhine and almost 30 miles south of Strasbourg is the Kaiserstuhl. This promontory is but three miles inland from the river with an elevation of over 1,600 feet, possessing advantages of observation similar to those of the High Vosges. Hostile elements advancing northward down the river would be caught in the crossfire from these respective heights. Only by outflanking enemy positions in the High Vosges.

from the north could forces penetrating the Belfort Gap stand reasonable chances of success on the Alsatian Plain.

The granite massif of the Vosges rises abruptly from the plain of Alsace, blocking easy entrance into the Rhine Valley from the west. The Saverne Gap divides the High Vosges to the south from the Hardt Mountains, sometimes called the Low Vosges, to the north. The High Vosges terminate in a series of summits towering above the Belfort Gap. The lower Vosges gradually descend to the forested hilltops in and about Kaiserslautern in the German Palatinate. These lower mountains present a more difficult military obstacle than the High Vosges, because



FRENCH BAR MEN IN POSITION OVERLOOKING BELFORT

"... For the French, that mission involved both frontal assault and an outflanking maneuver ..."

they have steeper valleys and are more heavily forested. Although the High Vosges reach elevations of over 4,000 feet, the western face of the mountain formation slopes gradually by a series of plateaus toward the Lorraine Plain. The eastern side drops abruptly into the Alsatian Plain

and the upper Rhine Valley. The topography of the Vosges would exclude penetration eastward in the Lower Vosges and embarrass progress northeast along the Belfort Gap. It remained, therefore, for the Seventh Army to force the passes which cut through the High Vosges in order to deploy upon the Alsatian Plain.

Sixth Army Group outlined the missions assigned to the First French Army and the American Seventh. For the French that mission involved both frontal assault and an outflanking maneuver. On D-Day of the November drive the French Army was to exert maximum pressure along its entire front to hold the enemy in line and to launch a strong attack against the Belfort Gap defenses. But before D-Day the French were to initiate their outflanking movement. Not later than 1 November the First French Army was to launch a strong effort on its left flank, to pass to the south of Gerardmer, and to assist the American Seventh Army in the capture of the Schlucht Pass. The Schlucht Pass cuts through the High Vosges between Gerardmer and Altkirch, one of the main east-west routes of communications through the Vosges mountains. Allied possession of the Schlucht Pass would tactically oust German forces south of the Pass. Enemy withdrawal from the summits at the extreme southern tip of the High Vosges would aid the First French Army in breaking through the Belfort Gap.

The offensive of the American Seventh Army was aimed at Strasbourg. The army was to secure a line of departure for the attack not later than 5 November and to cooperate with the First French Army during the same period on the approaches to the Schlucht Pass. With the clearing of the Forest of Parroy by XV Corps, positions were secured for an attack through the Saverne Gap. Farther south VI Corps continued to push the enemy back to the Meurthe River line while building up its striking power for the November offensive.

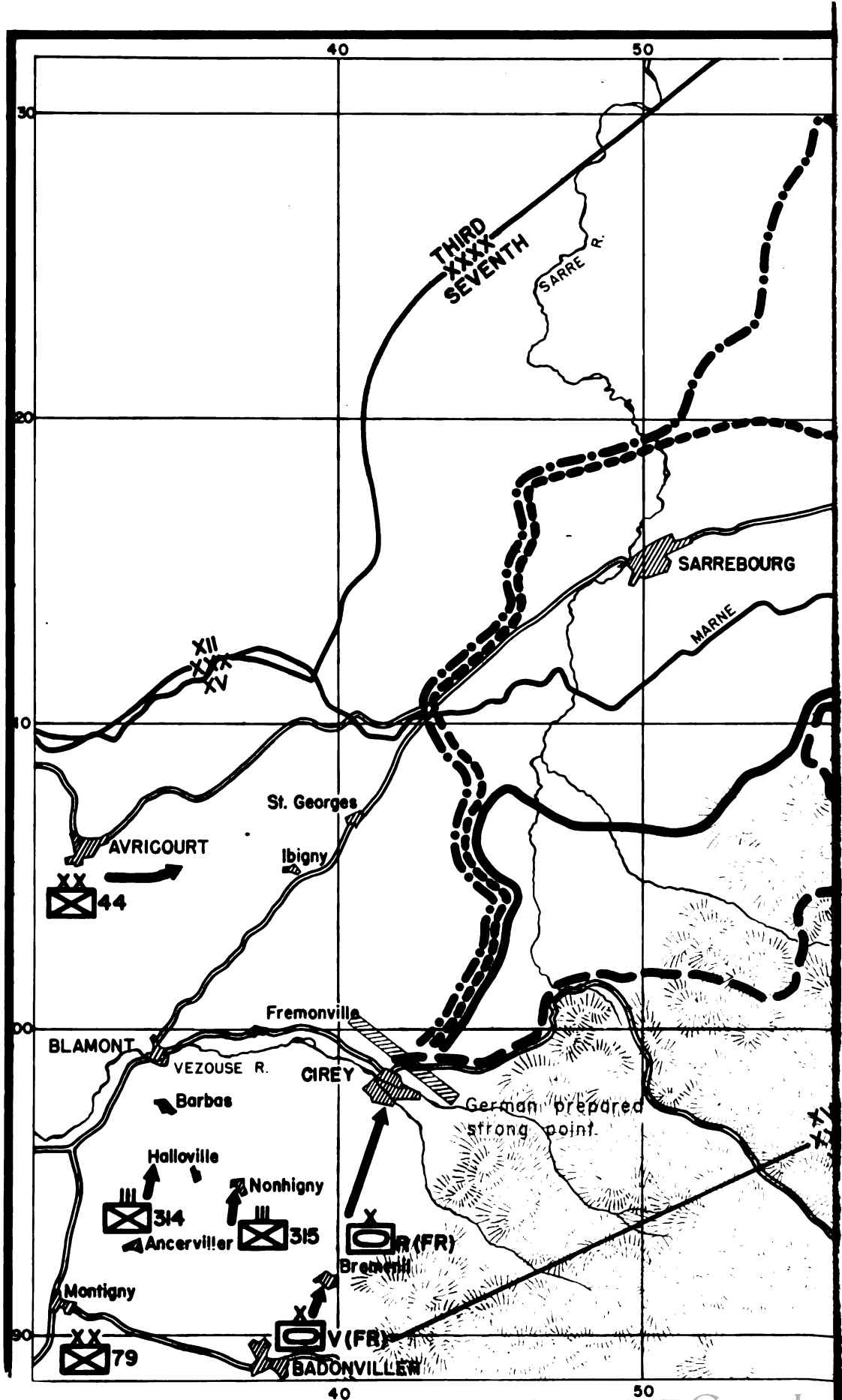
The enemy still hoped to keep the war out of Germany proper. East of the Vosges and directly in front of the Seventh Army advance lay the Rhine River. In the Lower Vosges and on the northern flank of the Seventh Army was the Saar region. Both the Rhine and the Saar were integrated into the German defense system, the Siegfried Line; but both would be threatened by the capture of Strasbourg and the loss

of the plains of Alsace. Even the capture of Strasbourg and the Belfort Gap, however, would not assure complete Allied possession of the Alsatian Plain. The enemy was firmly entrenched in the Vosges and had sufficient bridges across the Rhine between Strasbourg and Belfort, well protected by guns of the Siegfried Line, to enable him to continue operations. The German command elected to remain in this area after the capture of both Belfort and Strasbourg and waged war bitterly in the so-called Colmar Pocket.

The Vosges Mountains were the enemy's natural defense for the upper Rhineland. To supplement the advantages of topography the Germans built fortifications and outlined defensive tactics to hold the Vosges until at least the spring of 1945 so that time could be gained to strengthen the Siegfried Line. It was estimated that the enemy had the equivalent of only four infantry and one or two armored divisions guarding the main line of resistance from the Saverne Gap, southward, to the Swiss border. This southern sector of the western front had remained almost static for over a month, and German forces were needed farther north to defend more vulnerable and more valuable objectives.

The defenses of the Vosges were more impressive than their defenders. Between the Seventh Army and the Rhine were two lines of defenses, the pre-Vosges line and the main line of defense. The pre-Vosges line was located along the inferior heights of the western side of the Vosges. Constructed by the efforts of both German troops and conscript Alsatian labor, it presented the aspect of an almost continuous line from the Saverne Gap to the extreme southern end of the High Vosges, complete with trenches, networks of barbed wire, and antitank ditches. The main line of defense, along the military crest of the western side of the mountain range, was composed only of a series of strongpoints but so located as to block effectively the east-west entrances into and through the Vosges. These strategically located strongpoints included antitank ditches across the corridors of approach, machine gun and antitank positions, and numerous fire and communications trenches.

Such was the setting for the Seventh Army's November offensive. The enemy, with his traditional tactical skill, had exploited topographical features for defense to the maximum. He held the strongly-



fortified Vosges in front of the Seventh Army. He resisted stoutly the efforts of the First French Army to force the Belfort Gap. His occupation of the Siegfried Line and the Black Forest east of the Rhine were to render exceedingly complex the problem of complete occupation of the Alsatian Plain. The Seventh Army was committed to two missions: the capture of Strasbourg and the destruction of the enemy in Alsace west of the Rhine. The first mission was to be completed by XV Corps in an operation lasting only ten days. The second objective was to involve two American corps as well as the First French Army and was to be very costly in time, effort, and resources.

The Saverne Gap

In a field order dated 8 November, XV Corps outlined its plan for the capture of Sarrebourg and the forcing of the Saverne Gap. The

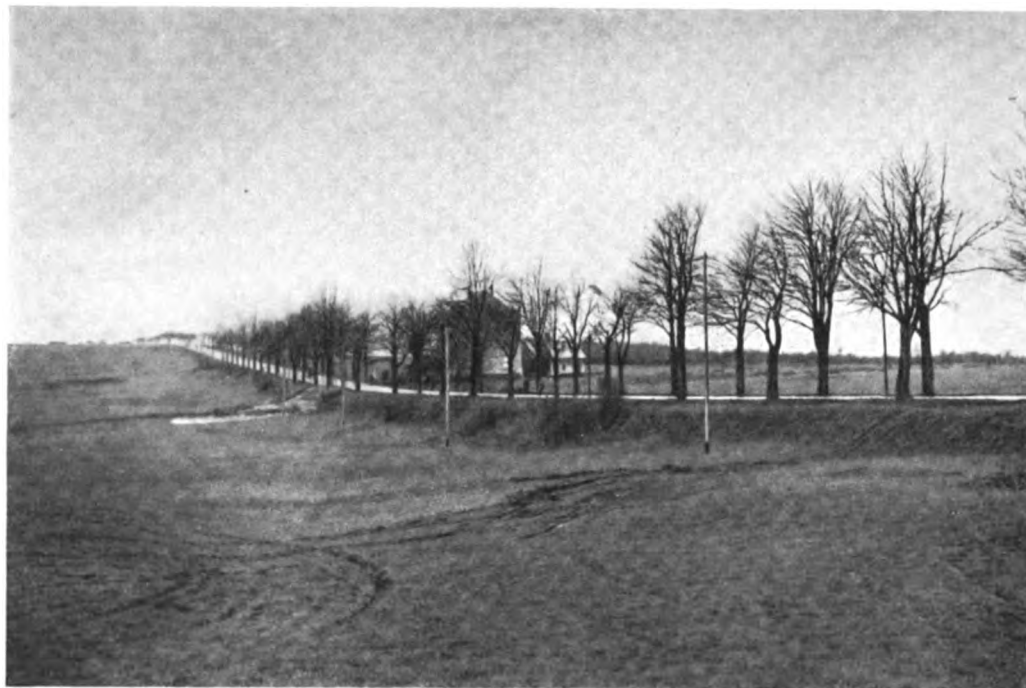


SAVERNE GAP

"... In a field order dated 8 November, XV Corps outlined its plan for the capture of Sarrebourg and the forcing of the Saverne Gap . . ."

44th and 79th Infantry Divisions were to occupy the corps north and south flanks respectively. The corps boundary on the north was still the Rhine-Marne Canal and on the south the Baccarat-Badonviller-Wangenbourg axis. The 44th Division was to attack Sarrebourg from the north and west, while the 79th Division was to assault the town from the south and east. Sarrebourg was the first major bastion in front of the Saverne Gap.

The pass at Saverne is the only depression through the Vosgian chain with gradient gentle enough to carry an artificial waterway. The Marne-Rhine Canal, a railroad line, and a minor highway traverse the gap proper. However, the main highway is to be found paralleling the pass some two miles to the north. The highway spans the five miles between Phalsbourg on the west side of the Vosges and Saverne on the east side at the narrowest part of the Vosgian chain. Although the high-



THE MAIN HIGHWAY LEADING TO THE SAVERNE GAP

"... The main highway is to be found paralleling the pass some two miles to the north ..."

way is not as defiladed as the gap proper, it is subject to commanding flank terrain. Both highway and gap had been prepared for defense. At Phalsbourg were antitank ditches in a series, two or three lines of trenches, and a few blockhouses. As in other strategic points in the Vosgian region, there were also remains of fortifications designed by Vauban in the age of Louis XIV. Sarrebourg, ten miles to the west of Phalsbourg astride the main route, Luneville-Saverne-Strasbourg, was also included in the formal defense system of the western Vosges.

The chief maneuvering element of the XV Corps in its November offensive was to be the French 2nd Armored Division. The 8 November field order directed the armored division to assemble on corps order prepared to: 1) In the event of a breakthrough, pass through the infantry divisions on corps order and seize the east exits of the Saverne Gap. 2) Displace one combat command promptly to the vicinity of Avricourt, on the 44th Division front some 10 to 15 miles southwest of Sarrebourg. 3) Advance on corps order to the vicinity of Weyer, ten miles northeast of Sarrebourg. The maneuver of the 2nd French Armored Division through minor routes north and south of the Saverne Pass were to make possible the XV Corps "left end run" and to carry the Seventh Army into Strasbourg.

When and where the breakthrough might occur would depend upon the tactical situation produced by the offensive activities of the two American infantry divisions. The displacement of a combat command to the vicinity of Avricourt was to await the penetration of the pre-Vosges line. Avricourt is on the main highway leading into Sarrebourg. The highway traversed the extreme left flank of the Seventh Army and, should the rate of advance be rapid, necessary precautions would have to be taken to prevent the enemy's driving down from the north and cutting in behind forward elements of the American forces pushing eastward. The preparation for advance to the vicinity of Weyer was primarily for purposes of tactical encirclement. Armored units at Weyer could drive southwest to Sarrebourg, southeast to Phalsbourg, eastward through the Vosges barrier by a minor route north of the Saverne Gap, or maintain a defensive position against aggressive German forces to the north.

D-Day of the XV Corps offensive was 13 November; H-Hour was 0700 hours. The advance, three-divisional in strength, reached all corps tactical objectives. The 44th Division pushed directly east to Sarrebourg. On the southern flank the 79th Division opened the way for the French 2nd Armored Division to force the Saverne Gap and ultimately to capture Strasbourg.

On the morning of 13 November the two infantry divisions jumped off as planned. The 314th and 315th Regiments of the 79th Division began their attack on the axis Montigny-Blamont. Initially there was very little resistance; but as the assault battalions continued to advance to the northeast, rolling up the entrenched positions of the German winter line, the enemy threw in heavy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire. By 16 November the enemy had been driven from Ancerville and Halloville, and fighting was in progress at Barbas and Nonhigny. Elements of French armor began operating in the division sector and captured Nonhigny. On the following day elements of the 79th Division drew up to the banks of the Vezouse between Blamont and Cirey-sur-Vezouse and forced a passage of the river against withering enemy fire.

Troops of the 44th Division had made a slow start, but after cracking the enemy's main line of resistance east of Leintrey, took Avricourt on the afternoon of 17 November against heavy enemy action. Two days later the 44th Division advanced in parallel strides with the 79th Division on its right flank, sweeping up the towns of Ibigny and St. Georges on the approaches to Sarrebourg. Elements of Combat Command V of the French 2nd Armored Division had seized Badonviller in the VI Corps zone by a rapid surprise attack on the morning of 17 November and pushed on to Bremenil on the road to Cirey.

The German pre-Vosges line of defense had begun to crumble, and the enemy had to withdraw along the entire XV corps front. The town of Cirey straddles the Vezouse River. Its defenses were being outflanked by the attack of the 315th Regiment of the 79th Division against Fremonville from the west and the south. Fremonville, on the north bank of the Vezouse between Cirey and Blamont, was defended by the enemy from high ground to the northeast. All American move-

ment was covered by effective and accurate German fire delivered from the highlands. Enemy resistance was the severest since the clearing of the Forest of Parroy. On 18 November the 2nd Battalion of the 314th Infantry was brought up to the western outskirts of Fremonville, which was not completely cleared until 1100 hours on the next day. By this time the other battalions of the 314th and 315th Regiments were advancing well to the north of the Vezouse on the roads to Sarrebourg.

Also on 19 November, the seventh day of the offensive, elements of the 2nd French Armored Division captured Cirey and spread out in all directions. A breakthrough now seemed certain. On 19 November XV Corps issued operations instructions relieving the 79th Infantry Division of its mission of assisting the 44th Division in the capture of Sarrebourg. The 79th Division was further directed to prepare for movement by all available transport to exploit any success of the 2nd French Armored Division and to protect the corps south flank. To the 44th Division was assigned the capture of Sarrebourg, advancing to the limit of its capabilities, and the protection of the corps north flank. At 1345 hours on the same day the 2nd French Armored Division was directed to execute the plan set forth in the field order of 8 November, to pass through the infantry divisions and seize the eastern exits of the Saverne Gap. The German main line of resistance had been broken along the Vezouse between Blamont and Cirey, and the tactical situation called for the employment of swift-moving armored elements to carry the Seventh Army through the Vosges to the Alsatian Plain.

Careful planning preceded the maneuver of the French 2nd Armored Division through the Saverne Gap. On D-Day minus 1, 12 November, the Division had issued a preliminary field order outlining routes to be followed, methods to be employed, and ends to be achieved. The provisions of the order were to become effective when it was certain that the principle line of enemy resistance had been broken, that only delaying elements would be met, and that sufficient depth of terrain was available to permit deploying on the axis of advance and of maneuvering without being stopped by obstacles.

It was intended to push a first echelon of armored sub-task forces in the direction of the Saverne Gap from the moment of the in-

fantry breakthrough, avoiding urban centers and usually travelled roads. The less obvious routes north and south of the gap would be traversed. This first echelon was to be followed by other combat elements. The forward echelon would probe for the point of weakest resistance, at which point the greatest mass of armor would be employed. Close liaison was to be maintained with the American infantry units to avoid interruption between the infantry breakthrough and armored exploitation. Liaison units were to keep armored elements informed of the tactical situation and the condition of the road network. It was planned to form four combat commands or tactical groups, L, D, V, and R. Combat Command L was to operate on the right flank with the 79th Division and Combat Command D on the left flank with the 44th Division. The remaining two combat commands were to be held in reserve to be employed on either or both flanks as the tactical situation might dictate. Combat Commands L and D, carrying their own fuel and rations and reinforced by engineers, tank destroyers, and reconnaissance troops, were placed on a three hour alert, prepared to move into their respective zones. Finally, no limit was to be set to the advance, nor were pre-arranged routes to be binding. It was believed that this freedom would permit the combat commands to reach the eastern exits of the Saverne Gap more quickly.

In the early afternoon of 19 November Combat Command L of the French 2nd Armored Division left Cirey to initiate the forcing of the Saverne Gap. The route to the east was through the Wolfsberg Pass, just north of Wangenbourg. This pass is on the Dabo road, parallel to and south of the Marne-Rhine canal as it traverses the Saverne Gap proper. Two alternate roads constituted the axis of approach to merge into a single road just before passing through the mountain village of Dabo and the defiladed pass of Wolfsberg. Combat Command L was divided into Task Force Massu and Task Force Minjonnet, in order to exploit all possible routes and to engage in outflanking maneuvers should one or the other task force be halted. Both task forces of Combat Command L encountered increasing enemy action as they progressed along these minor roads south of the canal. At 1600 hours, 20 November, Combat Command V was committed. Combat Commands V and R had

been held in reserve to be thrown along that axis which demanded reinforcement or which promised the maximum tactical returns. The commitment of Combat Command V along the southern route enabled the column of Combat Command L to overcome enemy defenses and to penetrate the Wolfsberg Pass. At 1400 hours on 21 November, Task Force Massu broke out on the Alsatian Plain south of Saverne at the village of Birkenwald.

The Vosges Mountains had been crossed, but only through a minor and tenuous route. The Saverne Gap proper, although outflanked from the south by Combat Commands L and V, was not forced. Phalsbourg on the west and Saverne on the east remained in enemy hands. A flanking movement to the north was necessary.

The penetration of the German southern flank at Cirey on 19 November had compelled the entire enemy line to withdraw toward the defenses of Sarrebourg. In this withdrawal the American 44th Division exerted a constant pressure against the German northern flank. An opportunity for an enveloping movement on the north flank developed, and another combat command of the French 2nd Armored Division initiated its maneuver to outflank the Saverne Gap from the north. Combat Command D was the second maneuvering element in the outline plan for the forcing of the Gap. At 1900 hours on 20 November Combat Command D was committed. Combat Command D had been divided into two task forces, Quilichini and Rouvillois. Progressing northward behind the 44th Division, passing Sarrebourg to the west, they turned abruptly east and crossed the Sarre River north of Sarrebourg. On the east bank of the river the two task forces followed diverse routes, Task Force Quilichini continuing its eastward course and Task Force Rouvillois executing a sweeping arc to the northeast.

Phalsbourg, the western gate to the Saverne Gap, was the goal of Task Force Quilichini. The French attack carried the task force through the first line of defense, but the German commander was determined to carry out his orders to hold Phalsbourg. Phalsbourg was not to be captured until later.

The broad sweep of Task Force Rouvillois carried the French armor through the Petite-Pierre route, a minor road through the Vosges

crest north of the main Phalsbourg-Saverne highway. This task force encountered an enemy strong in numbers but totally disorganized. The forward advance of the American Third Army, on the northern flank, had thrown elements of the 361st Volks Grenadier Division into the zone of French operation. Prisoners were taken and the advance continued. On the evening of 21 November Task Force Rouvillois reached the village of Bouxwiller on the plain of Alsace.

Two forces approached Saverne and were to meet in the town at about the same hour, 1415 on 22 November. Task Force Rouvillois of Combat Command D arrived from the north, and Task Force Massu of Combat Command L from the south. The subsequent capture of Saverne occurred without incident.

Task Force Minjonnet, also of Combat Command L, arrived in Saverne, having penetrated the Vosges along the Dabo road behind Task







PASS ON DABO ROAD. RHINE VALLEY IN BACKGROUND

" . . . Task Force Minjonnet . . . arrived in Saverne, having penetrated the Vosges along the Dabo Road behind Task Force Massu . . . "

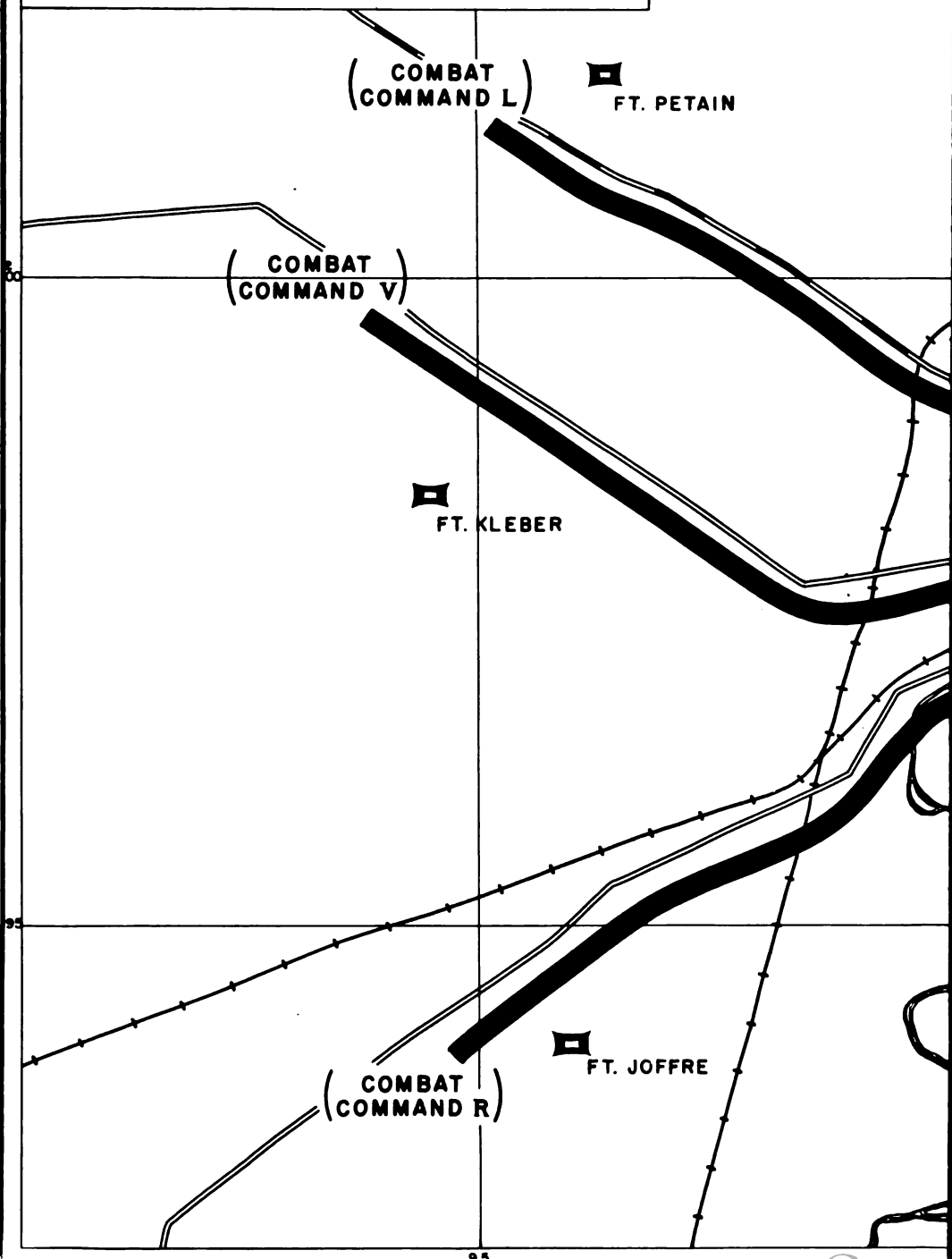
CITY OF STRASBOURG

FRENCH 2nd ARMORED DIVISION

LEGEND

-  Route and Direction of 2DB Units
 Enemy-Held Fortifications
 Main Roads  Secondary Roads

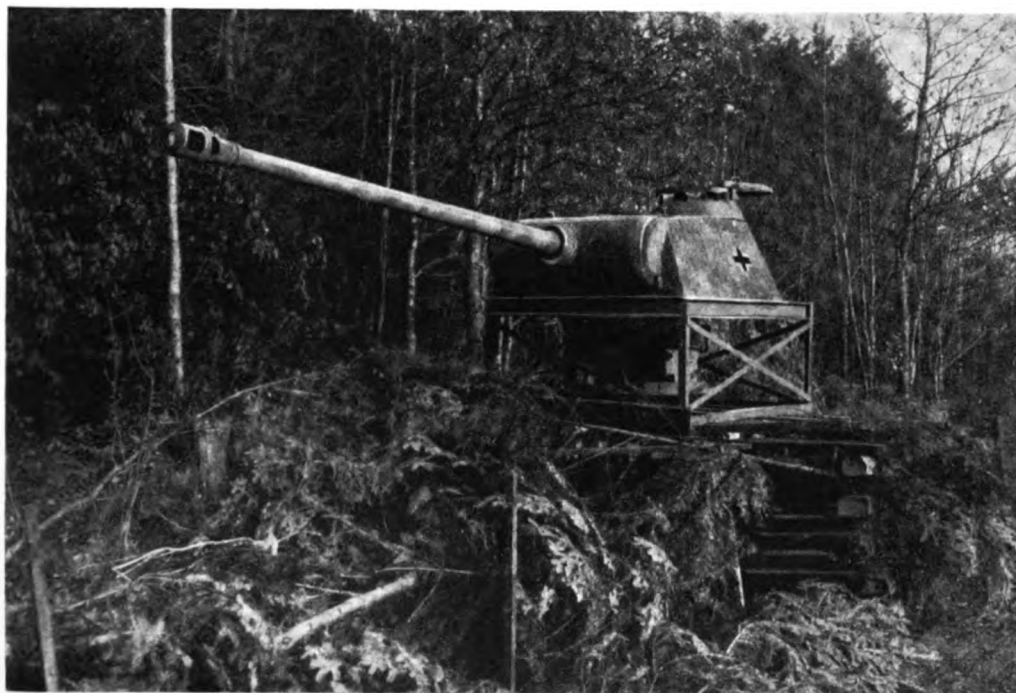
SCALE IN MILES



Force Massu. The Minjonnet group, however, upon reaching Saverne, reversed its direction of advance and pushed its armored units westward out of Saverne, along the main highway towards Phalsbourg. Advance elements of the task force approached Phalsbourg from the east to discover that most of the "88" guns in defense were pointing west to engage Task Force Quilichini of Combat Command D, which had been held up at the western approach to the town on the previous day. All resistance in Phalsbourg finally collapsed upon the arrival of American infantry, the 314th Infantry of the 79th Division on 23 November.

Strasbourg

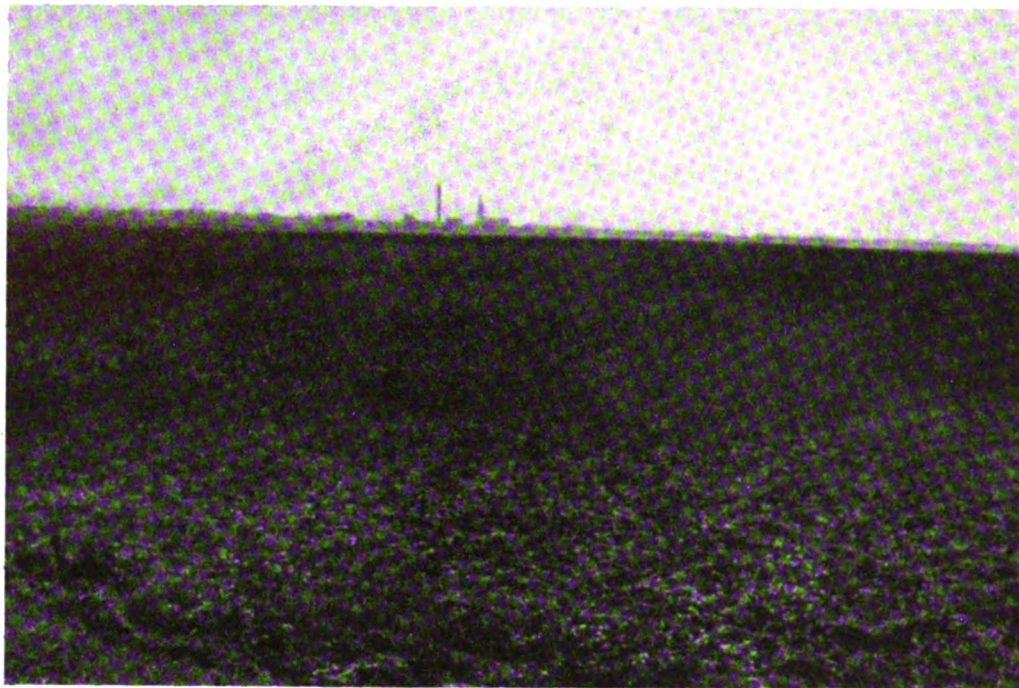
On 19 November the American 79th Infantry Division had broken through the German pre-Vosges defense line southwest of Sarrebourg. Through this hole passed the French 2nd Armored Division. By



ABANDONED GERMAN "88" GUN

"...Most of the "88" guns in defense were pointing west to engage Task Force Quilichini of Combat Command D..."

22 November the Saverne Gap had been outflanked from the north and the south. Saverne, on the east exit, was captured from the north and south, and Phalsbourg, on the west approach, was isolated from the east



STRASBOURG

"...To their rear were the Vosges. Before them lay Strasbourg..."

and west. French armored units were pouring into the Alsatian Plain. To their rear were the Vosges. Before them lay Strasbourg.

Strasbourg is the metropolis of the Alsatian Plain. Land routes, but more especially waterways, both natural and artificial, have contributed to its importance. The east-west passes through the Vosges in France and through the Black Forest in Germany converge upon the Alsatian Plain. At Strasbourg these land routes are joined with the Rhine River for communication with the north. The Rhine-Rhone Canal, passing through the Belfort Gap, and the Marne-Rhine Canal, following the Saverne Gap, terminate in Strasbourg to join the city by water with southern and northern France, respectively.

These peace-time considerations, however, were outweighed by the exigencies of wartime psychology. Strasbourg is the political capital of Alsace, a province annexed to Germany in 1871, returned to France in 1918, only to be re-occupied by Germany in 1940. The so-called "liberation" of Strasbourg was mandatory for the prestige of France. But the military possession of Strasbourg was not the tactical key to the Alsatian Plain. Strasbourg was captured by the Seventh Army, and the Rhine River was reached; but some time was to elapse before the Allied forces were to control the Alsatian Plain or to cross the upper Rhine River.

The extreme flatness of the Alsatian Plain had demanded for the protection of Strasbourg that the city be ringed by the construction of forts and the excavation of ditches, since natural terrain defenses were absent. The forts were located along main highways leading into Strasbourg or upon slight elevations immediately outside the city. These strongholds were 16 in number and were mostly infantry forts with no prepared emplacements for heavy guns. Their fields of fire, however, encompassed 360 degrees. The more important bastions were the forts Ney, Rapp, Ducrot, Marshal Petain, and Marshal Foch. The antitank ditch formed a single continuous semi-circle, originating near the Rhine-Rhone Canal to the south of Strasbourg, arching out westward and then northward to include the major forts in its zone of defense, and curving eastward toward the Rhine north of the city. The Vosges, not the forts or the antitank ditches, had been relied upon as the strongest defense for the city.

A Seventh Army directive of 5 November had initiated the offensive which began on 13 November. Rapid military developments, culminating in the outflanking of the Saverne Gap by the French 2nd Armored Division, called for new tactical instructions. Accordingly, a Seventh Army directive, dated 21 November, set the pattern for the final phase of the maneuver for Strasbourg.

The VI Corps, pushing through the Vosges passes between Saverne and Belfort, was to capture Strasbourg and to be prepared to cross the Rhine on army orders or to exploit through a bridgehead established by the XV Corps. The XV Corps was to force the Saverne

Gap, to capture Haguenau and Soufflenheim, to occupy the fortification at Mutzig, and to attack Strasbourg, employing armored elements to assist in the capture of the city. The XV Corps was then to reconnoiter the Rhine between Strasbourg and Soufflenheim and to take advantage of any opportunity for a quick crossing of the Rhine River. Both corps were to seize and to guard all bridges, barges, ponton equipment, cranes, and pile-drivers discovered on the Rhine and its tributaries.

The directive of 5 November had instructed the VI Corps, on the Seventh Army's south flank, to force the Vosges passes and to capture Strasbourg, while the XV Corps, on the north flank, was to capture Sarrebourg and to force the Saverne Gap. But by 21 November Sarrebourg had been encircled and the Saverne Gap outflanked by the XV Corps, while the VI Corps was making but slow progress in its push eastward through the High Vosges. The later directive of 21 November gave Strasbourg as the objective of either corps. The XV Corps, in addition to the drive towards Strasbourg, was assigned the mission of flank protection to the north, outflanking tactics to the south, and crossing opportunities on the Rhine to the east.

Haguenau and Soufflenheim lie on the Alsatian Plain, north of Strasbourg and west of the Rhine River. Haguenau was a strongly fortified city, outposting the Siegfried Line. Soufflenheim was a bridge-head town through which enemy traffic moved from Germany east of the Rhine to the upper Alsatian Plain on the west bank. To capture Haguenau would protect the Seventh Army's left flank. To capture Soufflenheim would interrupt lateral enemy communications across the Rhine north of Strasbourg.

Mutzig is a village controlling the eastern exit of the St. Die-Strasbourg highway, as it winds through the Vosges via the Saales Pass and Schirmeck, the main avenue of advance of the VI Corps. Since the XV Corps had already arrived upon the Alsatian Plain, it was directed to secure Mutzig in order to cut off enemy elements opposing the advance of the VI Corps east of St. Die. Should opportunities be present for a crossing of the Rhine River in the Seventh Army zone of eastward advance, the 40th Engineer Combat Regiment was directed to assemble stream-crossing equipment for assault crossings on a two-regimental

front. All equipment for one regiment was to be assembled and to be available on six hours notice after 0600 on 23 November. The remainder of the equipment for a complete division was to be made available after 0600 on 25 November.

At 1130 hours on 22 November General Leclerc, commanding the French 2nd Armored Division, received the order from XV Corps to aid the VI Corps in attacking Strasbourg, or to attack Strasbourg alone if the VI Corps were not in a position to do so. To follow this order the armored division employed the same four combat commands and the same sub-division into task forces as had been utilized in outflanking the Saverne Gap. However, the Saverne Gap operation had been characterized by wide encirclement and envelopment. The Strasbourg operation demanded rapid and concerted attack on the city from all possible directions. Speed was essential in order to deny the enemy the opportunity of regrouping within Strasbourg. Multiplicity of avenues of attack was mandatory, since all points in the enemy defensive ring about Strasbourg would have to be probed. The armored division was neither prepared nor equipped to lay siege to the city. Its mission was to find the weak spot and to drive through to the Rhine River.

Strasbourg was to be approached from the north, the west, and the southwest. The eastward thrust of the armored division across the Alsatian Plain would be protected by flanking screens to the north and to the south. Combat Command D, the group which had approached Phalsbourg from the west and which had outflanked the Saverne Gap to the north, was charged with holding the Saverne Gap, the main line of communication between the French 2nd Armored Division on the plain and the bulk of the American Seventh Army still in the mountains. Combat Command R, which had protected the southern flank in the armored push through the Vosges, was to continue to protect the south flank on the plain. Combat Command R, moreover, was to drive southward along the eastern ridge of the Vosges in the direction of Mutzig to fulfill the mission assigned by the Seventh Army directive of 21 November. The two remaining groups, Combat Commands L and V, were to execute the actual tactical maneuver for Strasbourg. Combat Command L, which had outflanked the Saverne Gap to the south, would

approach Strasbourg from the north. Combat Command V, which had followed Combat Command L through the southern routes of the Saverne Gap, was to approach Strasbourg from the south.

At 0715 hours on 23 November the four combat commands left the eastern flank of the Vosges to cross the Alsatian Plain into Strasbourg. The two maneuvering combat commands encountered enemy delaying action in front of the antitank ditch and along the forts. It remained for Task Force Rouvillois of Combat Command D, the group charged with holding the Saverne Gap, to discover the weak spot in the German defenses of the city and to lead the armored division into Strasbourg.

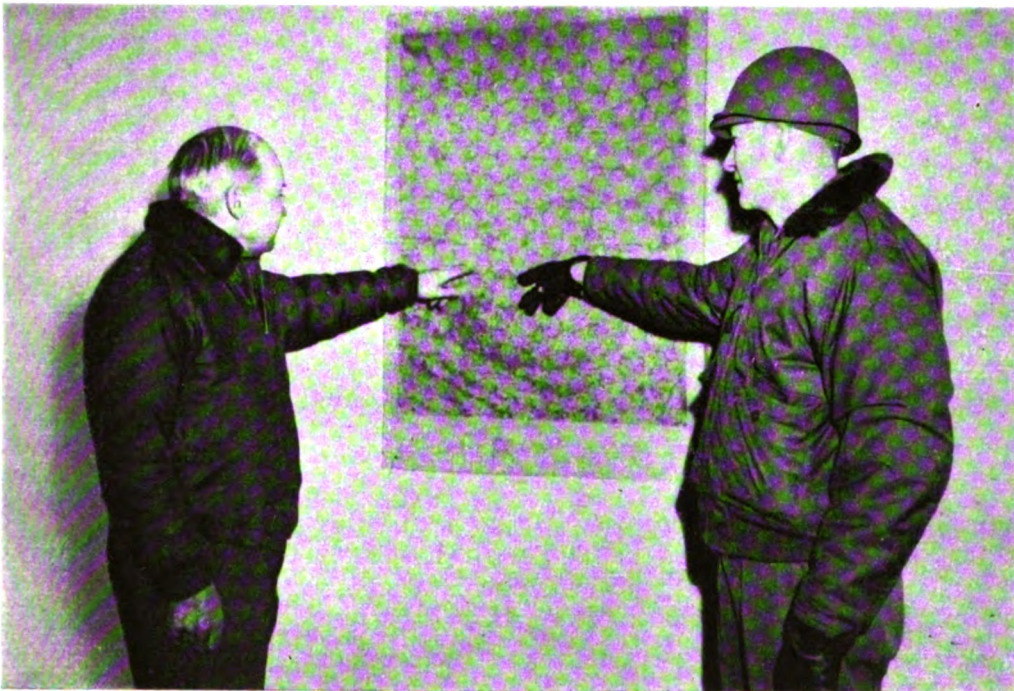
Task Force Rouvillois, having left the security of the exits of the Saverne Pass to Task Force Quilichini, embarked upon its southeastward sweep, which was to carry it through the city of Strasbourg and up to the Rhine River. The task force followed the north bank of the Marne-Rhine Canal in the waterway's eastward course from Saverne to Brumath on the Zorn River. At Brumath the task force headed due south for the northern suburbs of Strasbourg. At 1030, just three hours and 15 minutes after the departure time, the command post of the French 2nd Armored Division received the cryptic message, "Tissue est dans Iode" (Cloth is in iodine), or "Rouvillois enters Strasbourg and drives on to the bridge."

Task Force Rouvillois left the formal capture of Strasbourg to the other combat commands which were to enter the city later the same day, 23 November. The chief military objective in Strasbourg was the Kehl Bridge across the Rhine. Actually a series of bridges, spanning an artificial waterway, the Petit Rhin, and the Rhine River proper, this crossing was protected by permanent blockhouses and by machine guns placed on the bridge and reinforced by German artillery on the east bank of the Rhine. Strasbourg was captured but the Rhine was not crossed.

Tactical Problems

The French 2nd Armored Division had launched its drive on 19 November to exploit the breakthrough achieved by American

infantry. Similarly both the American 44th and 79th Divisions had been instructed by XV Corps to exploit the success of the French armored drive. The encirclement of Sarrebourg and the isolation of Phalsbourg by the French combat commands gave the advantage to the 44th and the 79th Divisions in the capture of both towns, which were quickly taken by the American infantry. The Saverne Gap was opened up, and infantry was pushed through toward Haguenau and Soufflenheim, the capture of which had been directed by the Seventh Army on 21 November. General Leclerc of the armored division had radioed the Commanding General of XV Corps at 1310 hours on 23 November that



MAJOR GENERAL WADE H. HAISLIP SHOWS A SITUATION MAP TO
LIEUTENANT GENERAL ALEXANDER M. PATCH JR., DURING THE
LATTER'S VISIT TO XV CORPS HEADQUARTERS

" . . . On 24 November General Eisenhower, accompanied by General Patch and General Devers, visited the XV Corps Command Post . . . "

"because of capture of Strasbourg push maximum infantry elements soon as possible east of Saverne". By the close of the following day the

79th Infantry Division, elements of the 45th Division, and the 324th Regiment were in that part of the corps zone east of the mountains. However, large numbers of infantry were not dispatched to Strasbourg until after several days, when the American 3rd Division assumed the occupation of the city. Problems of flank protection were more pressing than were dangers of immediate German counterattack from the Kehl Bridge at Strasbourg.

The main enemy threat developed north of Sarrebourg and Saverne. On the Third Army front most of November had been required to reduce the fortresses of Metz, about 60 miles northwest of Saverne. Metz was finally cleared of all resistance on 22 November, but the Third Army was able to make only limited advances to the east on the Seventh Army's northern flank. To meet the enemy attack which had developed some four miles north of Sarrebourg the 44th Division less one regiment, the bulk of the 45th Division, which had been released to XV Corps control at midnight 23-24 November, and the 106th Cavalry Group were stationed on the western side of the Saverne Pass. On 24 November General Eisenhower, accompanied by General Patch and General Devers, visited the XV Corps Command Post at Sarrebourg. The mission of XV Corps was changed by General Eisenhower's "verbal orders to army group and army from an advance east to an advance generally towards the north astride the Vosges Mountains." This change in mission became effective at once. The spearhead of advance was for the present aimed not at Germany across the Rhine but at Germany west of the Rhine.

It had long been appreciated that the crossing of the Rhine at the Kehl Bridge would lead only into the maze of the Black Forest, which would deny an army suitable ground for offensive maneuvers against important objectives in Germany. As early as October of 1944 the Seventh Army had formulated detailed plans for crossing the Rhine in the Rastatt area, north of Strasbourg, with Rastatt as the immediate objective, Pforzheim and Stuttgart as the secondary objective. Two river-crossing schools, at Valbonne and Dole, had been established under the supervision of the Army Engineer during the fall. Rastatt was chosen for the proposed crossing because it controlled the road-net leading to southeastern Germany and would open the way for an advance

northeast in the general direction of Nuremberg. The Seventh Army's crossing plans had by early November reached such an advanced stage that orders were issued to the 40th Engineer Combat Regiment to assemble bridging equipment. At the time General Eisenhower's order was issued, loaded DUKW's were actually moving toward selected forward assembly areas.

After the capture of Strasbourg the Seventh Army forward line assumed the outline of a large reverse "S". The northern flank constituted the upper portion of this imaginary figure. Running from west to east, this upper segment of the main line of resistance originated at a point of junction with the American Third Army northwest of Sarrebourg, and cut through the Vosges on a curve to reach the Rhine River at Strasbourg. At Strasbourg the line reversed its direction and followed a southwest course across the Alsatian Plain back into the Vosges to form the front line of the VI Corps still progressing through the mountains. The forward line then reversed its course once more to effect a union to the southwest with the front of the First French Army pushing northward down the Alsatian Plain.

This reverse "S" pattern of the Seventh Army's front line raised flank protection problems along four separate sectors: 1) The extreme left portion of the north flank west of the Vosges; 2) The right portion of the north flank east of the Vosges; 3) The extreme eastern tip of the main line of resistance at Strasbourg on the Rhine River; 4) The entire lower arc of the reverse "S", subsequently to develop into the "Colmar Pocket."

The enemy attack north of Sarrebourg had begun on 23 November, when a battle group of the 130th Panzer Division and elements of the 11th Panzer and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divisions struck south in an attempt to cut off the forward divisions of the Seventh Army, which were extended through the Saverne Gap to Strasbourg. This immediate threat, lasting until 27 November, was forestalled by the regrouping of XV Corps and by intervention of armor from the American Third Army. However, a potential threat to the Seventh Army's north flank west of the Vosges would continue as long as the enemy remained in possession of the Siegfried Line along the Franco-German border from

Lauterbourg on the Rhine to Saarbruecken on the Sarre. The northern flank, east of the Vosges, also remained vulnerable not only because of the Siegfried Line positions to the north, but also because of enemy bridgehead sites west of the Rhine. Here by 25 November the 79th Division and elements of the 45th Division consolidated positions north and northwest of Strasbourg. XV Corps attack was still pointed toward Haguenau and Soufflenheim.

To the south the American Seventh Army held positions on the Rhine at Strasbourg, and the First French Army had reached the Rhine north of Basel. The 2nd French Armored Division, which had



FRENCH GUN TEAM FIRING AT ENEMY 100 YARDS
UP RHINE RIVER BANK

" . . . The First French Army had reached the Rhine north of Basel . . . "

entered Strasbourg on 23 November, spent the next two days cleaning out pockets of resistance and the forts surrounding the city. Strasbourg remained under periodic enemy artillery fire emanating from the east bank of the Rhine. So tenuous was the Allied occupation of Strasbourg

that at the advent of the German counteroffensive complete evacuation of the city was seriously considered.

The line originating at Strasbourg to the north, sweeping westward to the Vosges and then southward to end at Basel, constituted the enemy's Alsatian bridgehead or "Colmar Pocket". This German pocket was supplied by two railroad and three ponton bridges across the upper Rhine south of Strasbourg and was to be stubbornly defended for some two or three months. The Seventh Army's VI Corps had broken through the High Vosges passes by the end of November but found only bitter fighting on its front on the northern circle of the Colmar Pocket.

By 24 November the German defense lines along the Vosges had been broken. Historically these mountains had been regarded as an impregnable position. Supplemented, as they had been, by extensive prepared defenses they constituted on paper an effective barrier to Allied advance. The German High Command, however, had failed to man the position with enough troops to transform the appearance of strength into reality. The German main line of resistance opposing the Seventh Army on 13 November was held by not more than 10,000 men. Opposing them were six American infantry divisions, with another in reserve, a reinforced French armored division, and a combat command of an American armored division.

The German high command had regarded the Vosges sector as static. Accordingly, troops had been diverted to meet threats to the enemy's right and left flanks and had been withdrawn to be saved for the German Ardennes counter-offensive. The 198th Infantry and the 269th Mountain Divisions had been diverted to the enemy south flank to ward off the French drive through the Belfort Gap, while the 11th and 21st Panzer Divisions had been shifted to the American Third Army sector on the north to meet the immediate threat in the Metz area.

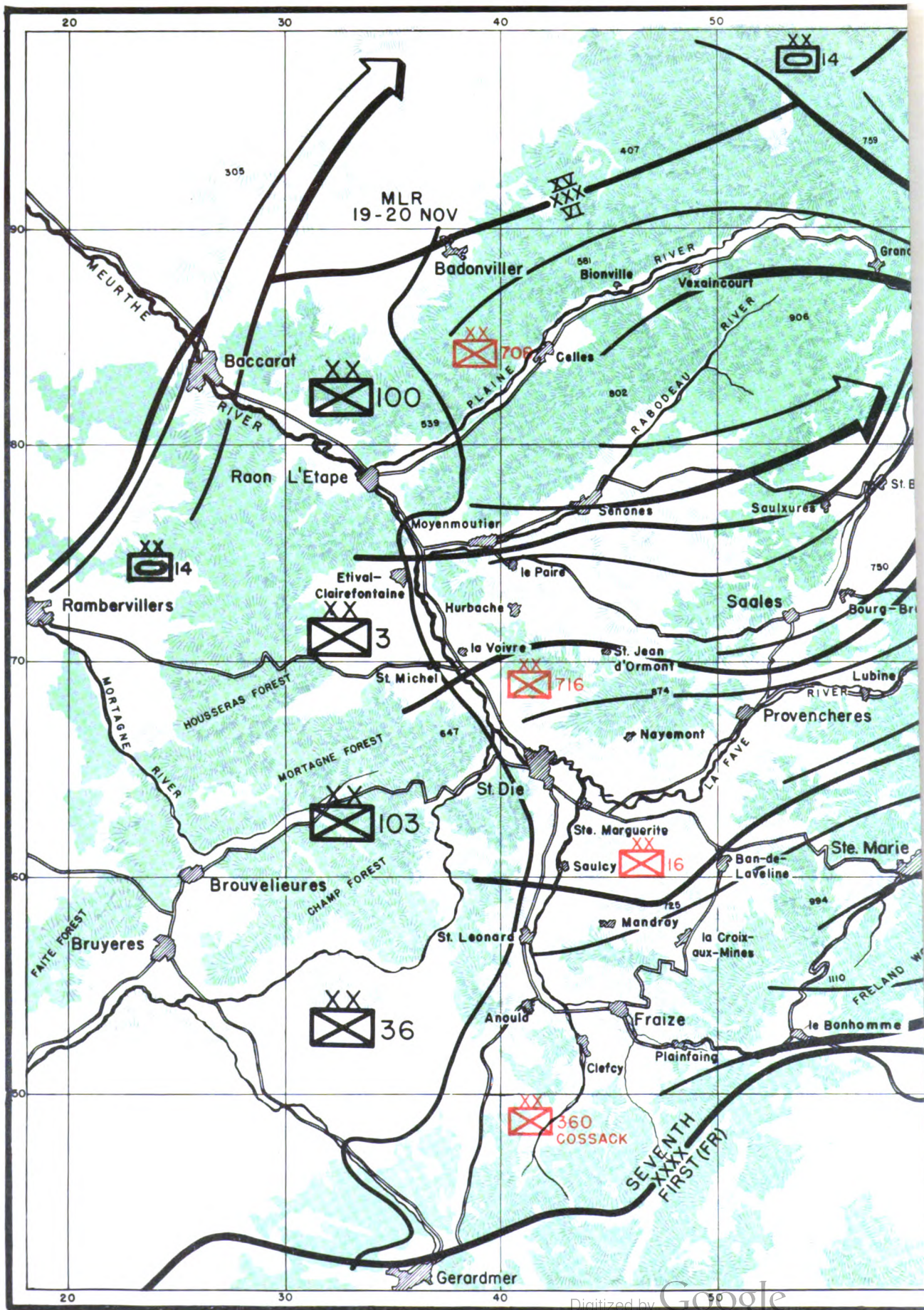
When the Seventh Army November offensive opened, coordinated with attacks along the full length of the western front, the enemy was in no position to fill all the gaps which opened simultaneously in his line. The three infantry divisions opposing the XV Corps on the Seventh Army north flank were split and scattered. The German 361st Division, on the enemy's extreme north, was forced out of its defensive

positions in the Vosges and squeezed northward into a salient, between the American Seventh and Third Armies, from which only remnants escaped. The 553rd Division, caught unprepared as it was about to leave the Seventh Army sector, was forced eastward before the XV Corps drive, was decimated in its attempts to make a stand, and was virtually liquidated in the envelopment of the Saverne Gap. Finally, the German 708th Division was shouldered southward into the Vosges and into the path of the VI Corps advance.

New Objectives

A Sixth Army Group letter of instruction dated 28 October had given as its mission the offensive to capture Strasbourg and to clear the area west of the Rhine. The French 2nd Armored Division fulfilled the first part of that mission on 23 November. The German retention of the Colmar and the Haguenau areas of the Alsatian Plain and of both sides of the Vosges Mountains along the Seventh Army northern flank delayed the fulfillment of the second term of the mission. Hence, on 24 November, a Sixth Army Group message dispatched to the Seventh Army Headquarters advised that no operational boundary had been projected for the Sixth Army Group east of the Rhine River. The Rhine River would be held at Strasbourg and north of Basel. The First French Army would concern itself with the liquidation of the Colmar Pocket. The Seventh Army would change its zone of advance to attack northward and would assist the American Third Army in breaking the Siegfried Line west of the Rhine. In this advance of the Seventh Army toward the Siegfried Line, the XV Corps would operate west of the crest of the Vosges, while the VI Corps would be active on the Alsatian Plain to the east of the mountains.

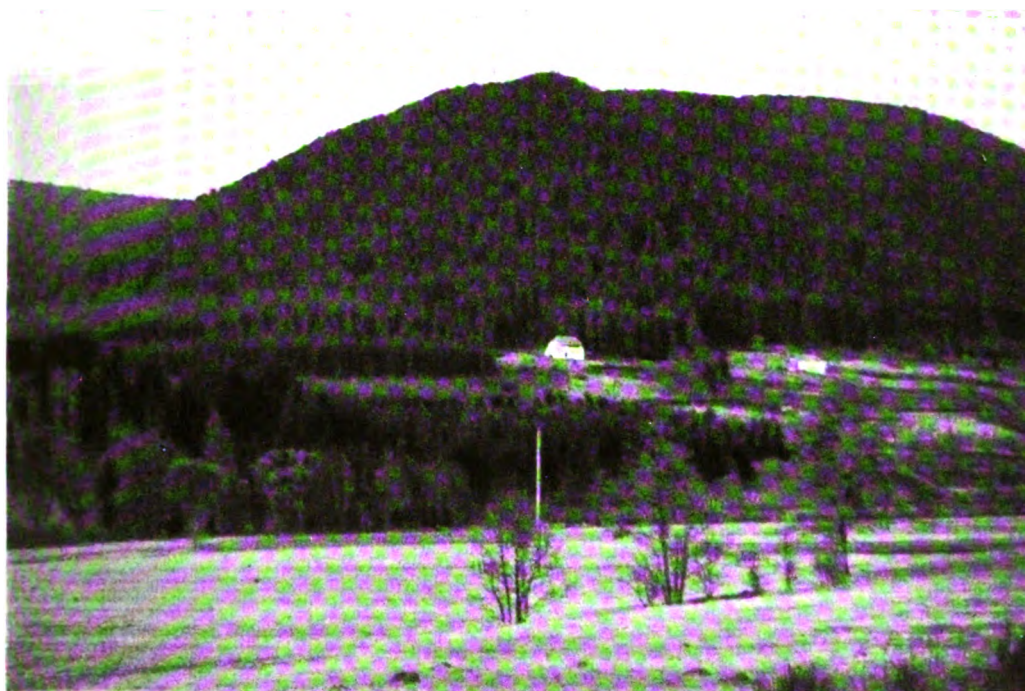
The destruction of the enemy west of the Rhine now became the new tactical phase in the operations of the Seventh Army. To complete its newly assigned mission Seventh Army had to reorganize its corps components and redistribute the weight of its forces. The VI Corps scheduled for a major shift in the line, was on 24 November pinned down in the fighting on the eastern slopes of the Vosges. Five days of combat had brought VI Corps units from the Meurthe River line through the mountains.



CHAPTER XVIII

VI Corps Penetration of Vosges

BY 19 November the VI Corps had reached the Meurthe River and was in position to cross the river and drive for the Vosges passes. Since D-Day of the Seventh Army offensive, 13 November, VI Corps troops had been engaged on one part of its assigned mission, the continuance of present operations. When the 3rd Division prepared to launch its attack across the Meurthe, there was no break in action; the drive con-



LE BONHOMME PASS

" . . . Farther south the St. Die-Colmar highway cuts through . . . the Bonhomme Pass . . . "



CHAPTER XVIII

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tinued along an axis pointed toward Strasbourg. From St. Die, focal point of corps strength, several avenues of advance fan out through the Vosges. One is the long narrow valley running through the Saales Pass,



GERMAN 20MM BOFORS GUN, PART OF THE MEURTHE RIVER
LINE DEFENSE

" . . . The enemy's Meurthe River line had by 19 November been at least partially broken by the 100th Division . . . "

northeast through Schirmeck, and along the Bruche River towards Strasbourg. Another branches off to the east from the Saales Pass, winds through the passes of Steige and Le Hohwald, and drops out of the mountains at the town of Barr. A third is a lower and shorter route across the backbone of the Vosges, through the Ste. Marie Pass leading to Selestat. Farther south the St. Die-Colmar highway cuts through Fraize, the Bonhomme Pass, and Kaisersberg. These four routes through the Vosges were the most important in the VI Corps zone between the XV Corps pass at Saverne and the First French Army, which followed the Gerardmer-Colmar road and the Belfort highways to Mulhouse.

The enemy's Meurthe River line, a system of trenches generally following the east bank of the river from Raon L'Etape to Fraize, with numerous machine gun positions, occasional antitank, heavy and light anti-aircraft, and self-propelled gun positions, had by 19 November been at least partially broken by the 100th Division with the capture of Raon L'Etape. The main line of defense along the crest of the Vosges consisted of fortifications at the passes. Their purpose was to provide protection to important installations against unexpected ground attacks or to provide delay if there were a general advance.

On 18 November VI Corps Headquarters issued Field Order No. 8 to outline the direction of the drive through the Vosges. The 100th Division was to protect the corps left flank, to maintain contact with the XV Corps, and to advance east from the vicinity of Moyenvoutier and Raon L'Etape. The 3rd Division, south of the 100th Division, was to attack to the northeast through the Saales Pass to Strasbourg. The 103rd Division was to seize the high ground northeast of St. Die, capture St. Die, and then advance southeast to the line Anould, Fraize, Ban-de-Laveline. On the south flank the 36th Division was to block on the line Anould-Gerardmer, to relieve the 103rd Division on corps order, and to protect the corps right flank, maintaining contact with the French.

The 14th Armored Division upon release by Seventh Army was to pass through the 100th and 3rd Infantry Division and to attack toward Strasbourg. The arrival of the 14th Armored Division, commanded by Brigadier General Albert C. Smith, coming from the United States through the port of Marseille, had been anticipated since the end of September. Combat Command A of this division was attached to VI Corps for operations effective 0600 hours on 19 November by Seventh Army Operations Instructions No. 15.

To deceive the enemy as to the direction of the main corps effort to the northeast and to influence the movement and commitment of enemy troops a show of force was to be made in another direction. The 45th and 36th Divisions were to be used as decoys to simulate preparations for an attack southeast toward Fraize, while the 3rd Division carried on its moves in darkness and secrecy.

Through the Saales Pass to Strasbourg

The 3rd Division, scheduled to spearhead the VI Corps drive, had made a careful survey of the terrain. The Meurthe River in its



A BAILEY BRIDGE OVER THE SWIFT FLOWING MEURTHE

" . . . The banks were generally suitable for the construction of military bridges and were an average of five to seven feet high . . . "

sector averaged 50 to 60 feet in width and three feet in depth, but might rise to five and six feet during heavy rains. The banks were generally suitable for the construction of military bridges and were an average of five to seven feet high.

Plans outlined 3rd Division operations for D-Day. After a maximum preliminary air attack against the assault area supporting artillery fire was to be directed on suspected enemy gun positions, concentration points, communication command posts, and targets of opportunity. On the night prior to D-Day the division was to cross the

Meurthe, rapidly establish a bridgehead, and advance aggressively beyond. The 7th Infantry Regiment was to cross the river and hold a bridge site at St. Michel. The 30th Infantry was to cross on the left



ARTILLERY SOFTENING UP THE MEURTHE RIVER DEFENSES

"... Supporting artillery fire was to be directed on suspected enemy gun positions, concentrated points, communication command posts, and targets of opportunity . . ."

flank, holding a bridge site at Clairefontaine and maintaining contact with the 100th Division. The 15th Infantry was to protect the assembly of the other two regiments, secure the line of departure, and cross the Meurthe on division order in the zone of either regiment. The 10th Engineer Combat Battalion, together with the 1st Battalion of the 36th Engineer Regiment, was to operate rubber boats at assault crossing sites, construct one infantry foot bridge per assault battalion, and one infantry assault bridge per assault regiment. It would select and mark suitable fords and provide dozers at assault sites to assist in the preparation of crossings for armored vehicles. Tanks and tank destroyers were to be

stationed in hull-down positions to support the crossing by direct fire, while the 3rd Chemical Battalion was prepared to smoke crossing areas and bridge sites after daylight.



**MEN OF THE 7TH INFANTRY REGIMENT MOVING
TO ASSAULT ST. MICHEL**

"... The 7th Infantry Regiment was to cross the River and hold a bridge site at St. Michel ..."

Operations Instructions No. 9, issued on 19 November, indicated H-Hour as 0645 hours on 20 November; and the 3rd Division was instructed to follow the Saales route to Strasbourg after the crossing. Last minute reconnaissance showed that the Meurthe River was at flood stage. The river banks were probably too soft to support armor. All bridges in the division sector had been demolished.

During the early morning hours before H-Hour and under cover of darkness both the 7th and 30th Regiments successfully crossed the Meurthe between Clairefontaine and St. Michel and gained vantage

points for assaulting enemy defenses. Foot bridge equipment and assault boats had been moved to the river bank by the engineers. A division battle patrol did valuable work in seizing and holding a bridge site.



MEMBERS OF THE 10TH ENGINEERS PRACTICING FOR THE
MEURTHE CROSSING

"... The 10th Engineer Combat Battalion . . . was to construct one infantry foot bridge per assault battalion, and one infantry assault bridge per assault regiment . . ."

H-Hour was preceded by 30 minutes of the most intense artillery preparation fired for the 3rd Division since the breakout at Anzio. This was followed by 30 minutes of counterbattery and deepening fires on enemy positions. The initial preparation was fired on the enemy's main line of resistance, from which infantry elements were but 200 yards away. After H-Hour the artillery continued to engage enemy targets including a convoy evacuating Moyenmoutier. A number of targets were marked with smoke for the air corps to bomb. Over 6,500 rounds were fired by 3rd Infantry Division Artillery alone, in addition to that fired by corps and group. In support of the VI Corps assault

across the Meurthe eight missions of 64 sorties were flown by the XII Tactical Air Corps prior to noon. Enemy troop concentration areas, strong points, and gun positions were attacked with blaze, demolition, and fragmentation bombs.

Although the enemy had prepared extensive earthworks to oppose the river crossing, the intensity of the preparation and the momentum of the assault so disrupted his communications that he was never able to offer more than slight delaying resistance. The majority of prisoners captured reported that the attack came as no surprise, although the exact date was not known. Increased air activity on 19 November caused the enemy to assume that an attack was imminent, and artillery fire on 19-20 November strengthened this belief. Prisoners reported that Meurthe positions, not completed and greatly undermanned were not strong enough to delay the advance. Enemy troops, unable to oppose the river crossing, were generally resigned to the situation. The small respite which had been gained by the German 716th Infantry Division between 12 and 20 November did not much improve the division's morale. There were no reserves in the area for relief, and prisoners were skeptical about holding up the advance.

As the 3rd Division spearheaded the VI Corps attack, both the XV Corps on the left and the First French Army on the right were making rapid advances. On 20 November the XV Corps was engaged in wide sweeping movements through the Saverne Gap. The French had already overrun Belfort and had reached the Rhine River in the vicinity of Mulhouse. These major breakthroughs by the French at Belfort and by the XV Corps at Saverne were causing a cave-in at the center of the line where the VI Corps was located. The enemy was forced to withdraw from certain of his outflanked defense positions.

The 30th Infantry pushed north along the St. Die-Raon L'Etape road beside the Meurthe to establish a firm bridgehead. Clairefontaine was assaulted and Hurbache and Le Paire below Moyenmoutier taken. The 7th Infantry overran La Voivre. This town, heavily mined and booby-trapped, was taken by a flanking movement from the south. The regiment suffered 150 casualties from mines alone.

On 21 November the 30th Infantry Regiment attacked east in three columns, sweeping through several small villages north of St. Die. The 7th Infantry Regiment, attacking southeast, occupied St. Jean d'Or-



AMERICAN ARMOR CROSSING THE MEURTHE OVER BAILEY
BRIDGE BUILT BY THE 36TH ENGINEERS

"... The enemy covered the bridge site with artillery and self propelled fire ..."

mont. Rising waters of the Meurthe River had washed out assault foot-bridges and threatened to slow down the attack, but a Bailey bridge was rapidly constructed at St. Michel by the 36th Engineers. The enemy covered the bridge site with artillery and self-propelled fire, but an effective smoke screen obscured the target and there were no direct hits.

All along the Sixth Army Group front rapid progress was being made. Just before midnight 21-22 November, Major General Brooks, VI Corps Commander, telephoned all divisions that in view of enemy withdrawals there be organized a fast moving and hard hitting mobile task force of tanks, tank destroyers, artillery, motorized infantry,

engineers, and reconnaissance elements in each division to strike for corps objectives. All scattered resistance was to be by-passed and disposed of by the follow-up infantry.

In answer to these instructions the 3rd Division formed Task Force Whirlwind from the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry, reinforced. It jumped off in the morning of 22 November and moved rapidly along minor routes through the mountains north of St. Die in the direction of St. Blaise midway between Saales and Schirmeck. By nightfall the task force reached the mountain town Saulxures. Columns of the 30th Infantry spread out and pressed on toward St. Blaise behind Task Force



7TH INFANTRY MORTARMEN IN THE ST. JEAN AREA

" . . . The 7th Infantry, on the division right flank, attacked east from St. Jean d'Ormont toward the pass . . . "

Whirlwind. The 7th Infantry, on the division right flank, attacked east from St. Jean d'Ormont toward the pass and town at Saales.

The town of Saales, astride the main route through the Vosges to Strasbourg, was now a key objective of the 3rd Division. Enemy

defenses here were well dug-in with prepared emplacements surrounded by barbed wire. In the area from Saales to Saulxures to the northeast enemy positions consisted of a series of trenches, overhead dugouts, tank traps, obstacles, and wire entanglements.

On 22 November the 2nd Battalion, 30th Infantry, had driven to high ground overlooking Saales. Night patrols reconnoitering toward the town met heavy enemy opposition. The battalion put pressure and fire against the northern flank of the town, while the 7th Infantry attacked from the south and the west. Before dawn of 23 November the 7th Infantry had infiltrated through the enemy fortifications into



SOME OF THE DEFENSES ENCOUNTERED BY THE 3RD DIVISION
IN THEIR DRIVE FOR SAALES

"... From Saales, to Saulxures to the northeast, enemy positions consisted of a series of trenches, overhead dugouts, tank traps, obstacles, and wire entanglements ..."

Saales. House to house fighting followed. By 1430 hours the 30th Infantry reported the town clear of snipers. Quantities of wire, ammunition, and other supplies were captured to substantiate reports that

Saales had been planned as a key bastion of the enemy's winter defenses. However, few of the larger weapons were installed; and fortifications were found incomplete. The enemy's withdrawal from Saales by way of St. Blaise, Schirmeck, Mutzig, and Strasbourg became almost a flight. Even bridges were left intact. The capture of Strasbourg by the 2nd French Armored Division of the XV Corps meant that enemy positions in front of the 3rd Division were now untenable.

On 23 November the 30th Infantry captured Saulxures after heavy fighting. The next day, Task Force Whirlwind, spearheading the 3rd Division advance along the Bruche River Valley toward Strasbourg, reached Rothau. This enemy supply point yielded four warehouses of supplies. Near Saales the 7th Infantry entered Bourg-Bruche and engaged a 300 man force seemingly intent on retaking Saales. Driving along the Rothau-Schirmeck-Mutzig axis against virtually no opposition, 3rd Division troops made contact with 45th Division elements of the XV Corps on the outskirts of Mutzig near the entrance to the Alsace Plain on 25 November.

Interrogation revealed confusion of enemy troops caused by the rapidity of the advance and the enemy's ignorance of corps disposition. German morale was low, and the troops were extremely tired and in many cases short of food. Prisoners referred constantly to American heavy superiority in men, infantry weapons, and armor. It was evident that the enemy had planned to hold a winter line in the Vosges; but, finding himself outflanked and in a precarious position, he withdrew to the Rhine.

Surging eastward with all possible speed, 3rd Division elements broke out of the Vosges Mountains and onto the Alsace Plain at numerous points on 26 November. On the left flank one battalion of the 15th Infantry was engaged in clearing Mutzig, while the rest of the regiment advanced northeast and east without opposition, occupying Molsheim and nearby villages. American units were now experiencing a significant transition in the push to Germany. "With startling suddenness," reports one journal, "the battalion switched from positions high in the Vosges to small towns in Alsace that were battered by the enemy. From cities and villages that were predominantly French, we

moved to cities and villages where speech, dress, and customs were predominantly German."

3rd Division G-2 had received reports that eight miles from Rothau there was a German concentration camp near Natzviller. A documents team sent to investigate reached the camp at 1000 hours on 26 November. They found an enclosure which was rectangular in shape, surrounded by two barbed wire fences which could be charged with electricity. At regular intervals watchtowers with floodlights were set around the area. Two men who managed to escape from the camp several days before the arrival of the American troops aided the



SNIPERS IN THE SAALES AREA BEING INTERROGATED

"...Prisoners referred constantly to American heavy superiority in men, infantry weapons, and armor..."

investigators in realizing the full horror of the establishment. Among the deathdealing devices was a "shower room", where prisoners could be asphyxiated, and a crematorium with an elevator-like device to

simplify the placing of victims in the furnace. The camp had a normal capacity of 3,000 prisoners and a maximum of 4,200. The vast majority were political opponents of the Nazi regime, but there were also Bible students, Jews, priests of various denominations, homosexuals, "socially unfit" elements, and habitual criminals. Most of the prisoners had been evacuated on 16 November with the threat of the American advance. Plans had been made to blow up the place, and documents had been packed ready to be moved. So rapid had the corps progress been that explosives could not be brought into the camp in time and the SS men had fled.

Leaving a battalion behind in the Rothau-St. Blaise area to mop up and hold roadblocks, the 7th Infantry moved by vehicle during the night of 26-27 November to Strasbourg and the next night relieved the 2nd French Armored Division of front line positions there. A enemy holding force still remained on the west bank of the Rhine guarding three escape bridges across the river. The 15th Infantry likewise crossed the Alsace plain for its watch on the Rhine, while the 30th Regiment remained behind to mop up several villages south of Molsheim.

Although units of the 3rd Division entered Strasbourg to occupy and defend positions, they were not the first American troops in the area. A special "T" Force had been organized for special operations in the city of Strasbourg according to instructions from Sixth Army Group. "T" Force, including combat elements from VI Corps, reached its destination by 25 November. On 29 November the "T" Force commander reported that Alsatians were antagonistic toward assumption of control by French newcomers, that assassination of French officials had occurred, and that in his opinion American troops instead of French should be kept in the city until violent feeling had subsided. Strasbourg was caught in the ancient struggle between German and French loyalties. The careful balance between French and American control in Strasbourg was almost upset by conflicting proclamations. General Leclerc, commanding the 2nd French Armored Division, had issued orders for the execution of sharpshooters and persons sheltering sharpshooters, five German hostages for each French soldier shot in the city. Since such orders were obviously at variance with international

law, there were immediate repercussions. General O'Daniel, commanding the 3rd Division, became involved when he was quoted as approving General Leclerc's regulations. Subsequent investigation indicated that the American general had not subscribed to the penalties involved for infractions of the normal regulations of civilian control. Instructions from Seventh Army at all times conformed to the Geneva Convention. A statement to such effect, refused for newspaper publication by the French military governor in Strasbourg, was ordered proclaimed in the city by means of posters. However, on 10 December the French agreed to a newspaper interview. International policy and French policy had been satisfied.

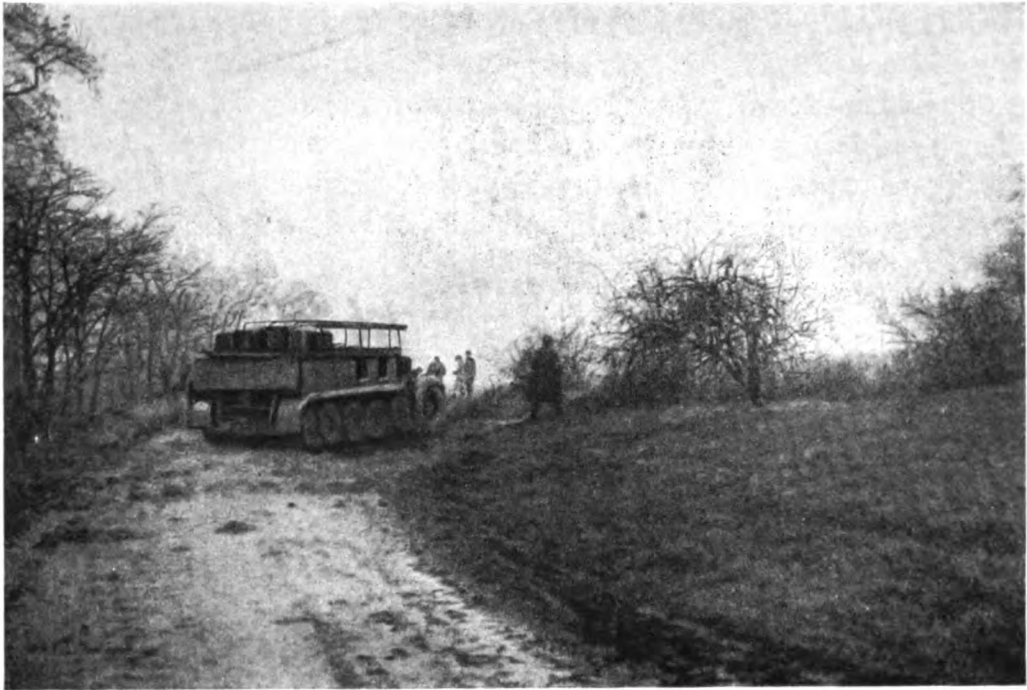
In the meantime 3rd Division units organized anti-paratroop defenses under the threat of possible counterattack. Troops were kept



HOLE THAT WAS BLASTED IN THE WALL OF THE GERMAN
FORTRESS NORTH OF MUTZIG

" . . . On 4 December Company E exploded a three and one-half ton demolition charge against the fort . . ."

on the alert, and there was continuous patrolling of areas of responsibility. From across the Rhine the enemy shelled the area between Strasbourg and the river with 240mm shells, scoring two



**PREPARING GERMAN HALFTRACK WITH THREE AND ONE-HALF TONS
OF TNT TO BE RAMMED INTO ENEMY HELD FORTIFICATION**

"... Using a captured German halftrack to roll the charge up to the fortification . . ."

direct hits on Strasbourg's main power plant. 3rd Division artillery destroyed three power launches and several rubber boats launched by the enemy under cover of a smoke screen. Harassing fire was also placed on the bridges across the Rhine at Strasbourg.

Though enemy resistance in the 3rd Division sector had practically collapsed, an old Maginot line fortress north of Mutzig still held out and refused to surrender. Company E of the 30th Infantry was given the mission of neutralization. Despite direct fire of a 155mm howitzer and a 155mm gun, this enemy group continued to hold out and even sent a radio message requesting equipment, food, and medical

supplies. On 2 December the XII Tactical Air Command attacked the fort with blaze bombs with no apparent effect on the fort or its occupants. On 4 December Company E exploded a three and one-half ton demolition charge against the fort, using a captured German halftrack to roll the charge up to the fortification, and breached an eight foot hole in one wall. Under cover of darkness nine of the enemy including two officers were captured after a small arms fight, as they attempted to escape from the fort. Interrogation indicated that there were 82 stragglers from miscellaneous units still in the subterranean passages. The fort finally succumbed on 5 December after being subjected to dive-bombers and demolitions.

In the Strasbourg area 3rd Division elements had pushed out to eliminate the enemy-held bridgehead on the eastern outskirts of the city near Kehl. Enemy forces located in apartment houses and buildings used machine gun and sniper fire to hold the bridgehead. On 1 December all important Rhine bridges at Strasbourg had been blown and the bridgehead was gradually withdrawn. The bulk of enemy forces were evacuated by boat under cover of heavy fog.

The 100th Division, which had been engaged in clearing the area around Raon L'Etape, was instructed by Field Order No. 8 of the VI Corps to drive east from Moyenmoutier to protect the corps left flank. On 20 November the division captured the remainder of the hill southeast of Raon L'Etape against light resistance. The 1st Battalion, 397th Infantry, attacked southeast to seize Moyenmoutier against no opposition on the next day and then continued east until it was just short of Senones, along the Rabodeau River Valley.

Under corps instructions the 2nd Battalion of the 398th Infantry, reinforced, was organized as a task force commanded by Colonel Nelson I. Fooks. The task force was given the mission of a rapid motorized movement to St. Blaise on the Bruche River along the 3rd Division axis of advance. Senones was finally taken by elements of the 397th Infantry in a flanking movement to the east. The task force, which had been held up by mined roadblocks at Senones, followed and passed through the 397th Infantry only to be stopped by other barricades along the mountain roads south of the Moyenmoutier-St. Blaise highway.

The 397th Infantry, following the main highway, reached St. Blaise, which it captured in conjunction with 30th Infantry troops.

Both the 100th and 3rd Divisions were now on the Bruche River road. Since the 3rd Division had first priority on this route, the 100th pushed its main effort up the Plaine River Valley northeast of Raon L'Etape. The 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron with the 1st Battalion of the 398th Infantry attacked northeast along the valley to clear Celles, Bionville, Vexaincourt, and other valley towns. Elements of the 399th Infantry, operating the road net to the northwest of the Bruche River, advanced rapidly against only delaying detachments to reach the vicinity of Rothau. The 397th Infantry blocked to the north to protect the main division supply route. On 25 November the 100th Division continued its advance as the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron knocked out an enemy roadblock and reach Grandfontaine.

As a part of its reorganization of the two corps Seventh Army issued on 26 November Operations Instruction No. 21, which directed that the 100th Infantry Division be prepared for a shift in advance to the north. The division was instructed to halt all forward movement and assemble in the Raon L'Etape area for immediate movement to the vicinity of Sarrebourg. As of 27 November at 0800 hours the 100th Division was relieved of attachment to VI Corps and attached to XV Corps.

Through the Steige and Le Hohwald Passes to Barr

The 103rd Division had been given the mission of assembling two infantry regiments in the vicinity of Etival, crossing the Meurthe, seizing the high ground northeast of St. Die, and capturing St. Die. On the morning of 20 November the 3rd Division established its bridgehead across the Meurthe. At 1600 hours that day the 409th and 410th Infantry Regiments of the 103rd Division were directed to move behind the 3rd Division front, prepared to cross the river at the site of the 30th and 7th Infantry bridgeheads.

On the night of 20-21 November the 409th and 410th Regiments crossed the Meurthe. Since the river had risen and washed

out most of the bridges used by the 3rd Division, ammunition and supplies had to be carried across one remaining footbridge. Once the crossing was made, both regiments attacked to the southeast. Before nightfall of 21 November St. Die was outflanked, when the dominating hill mass to the north fell to the advance of the 410th Infantry. The 411th Regiment on the west bank of the Meurthe maintained positions along the previous division front west and south of St. Die. On 22 November a company from the 409th Infantry entered St. Die unopposed. So grateful was the town for its liberation that the mayor named the town square after the 103rd Division. The key to the roads in the central Vosges sector was now in American hands.

The 410th Infantry seized Nayemont east of St. Die, while the 409th Infantry continued its attack east to reach a line 3,000 yards west of Provencheres. At 0430 hours on 22 November the 411th Regiment crossed the Meurthe south of St. Die near Saulcy and, encountering no resistance at first, established a bridgehead. However, well-concealed German positions which had held their fire, then opened up with a heavy concentration of artillery, mortar, machine gun, and sniper fire. This slowed the attack until the enemy positions were overrun.

The 103rd Division had been directed on the previous day to create a small task force to seize and hold the Steige Pass to the east. Task Force Haines was formed by reinforcing the 2nd Battalion, 409th Infantry. Troops of the 409th Infantry moved down from high ground northwest of Provencheres and occupied the town after a sharp fight. The 409th and 410th Regiments then moved east toward Ville, the capture of which would outflank the Steige Pass. The 411th Infantry, meanwhile, was engaged with the 36th Division to the south in the clearance of the Anould-Fraize-Ban de Laveline arc. By 23 November the 411th had reached positions dominating Ban de Laveline.

Under Seventh Army pressure, enemy withdrawals became disorganized and the divisional advance increased in speed. After leaving Provencheres the 409th was temporarily delayed on 24 November by a blown railroad pass west of Lubine, but the town was soon occupied after a brief fire fight. The Corps Commander issued orders to the

division to move one regiment to the vicinity of Steige to cut off enemy troops retreating from the Saales-Bourg-Bruche area. One battalion of the 411th Infantry was sent immediately by motor toward Steige by way of Lubine.

It was recognized that the towns of Ville and Steige were the key to advances in the divisional sector. Together they controlled the roads from Saales to Selestat; and between them passages reached north through Le Hohwald to Barr, Obernai, and beyond to Strasbourg. On 25 November Task Force Haines advanced east from Bourg-Bruche toward the Steige Pass where the enemy held well organized positions. Farther south other troops of the 103rd Division moved along secondary roads through heavily wooded hills, by-passed scattered resistance, and travelled cross-country to pull up southwest of Ville. Not only did the infantry follow these tortuous mountain approaches, but two batteries of the 383rd Field Artillery Battalion likewise moved through using winches and other expedients.

The 409th Infantry moving up from the southwest on 26 November occupied Steige, which was heavily defended by riflemen and snipers. At the same time the 411th Regiment moved up to the Steige-Ville road from the southwest, by-passed enemy positions, and cut directly across forest trails, carrying much equipment by hand. Resistance was heavy. Wires were cut repeatedly, and wiremen and messengers became casualties. The regiment finally closed in on the highway and occupied a small village between Steige and Ville. Task Force Haines, advancing through Steige along the Saales-Selestat road, now attacked Ville from the northwest, while the 410th Regiment attacked from the southwest, moving up on the right flank of the 411th Regiment.

Some of the division's toughest fighting took place in its effort to capture Ville. Barricades, thick log entrenchments, and heavy artillery fire from the surrounding hills opposed the advancing troops. The fall of Ville, late in the afternoon of 26 November, cracked the line that the Germans had been holding from Saales southeast to the Rhine Plain. Prisoner identifications indicated that the enemy had his greatest strength on this front, presumably to protect the approaches to Selestat.

The division objective now was to pour out on the Alsace

Plain, pressing northeast in the direction of Barr. On 27 November the 411th Infantry struck northeast from the Steige-Ville road in a drive through the Le Hohwald Pass. It followed a winding road through rugged mountain terrain to enter the town of Le Hohwald. The next day, the regiment attacked east in a two-pronged drive on Barr. One column travelled over a northerly route on secondary roads to reach the outskirts of Barr unopposed. A second column used the main road through the valley and ran into heavy resistance at a well-defended roadblock. Mortar, and 88mm fire stopped the advance. Barr was occupied on 29 November by the northern column, while the remainder of the 411th Regiment seized Andlau against stiff opposition.

The other two regiments of the 103rd Division, in the meantime, fought along minor roads east of the axis Le Hohwald-Ville in the direction of the Barr-Selestat highway. The enemy engaged in strong delaying action. On 27 November a large motor column of enemy infantry, moving into the Ville-Barr-Selestat triangle, was fired on by division artillery with an estimated destruction of 80 percent of the convoy. During the period 27-30 November the division advance, converging on Epfig on the Barr-Selestat road, was made against enemy artillery fire interdicting all routes of communications and in the face of several determined enemy counterattacks. By 30 November all regiments of the 103rd Division had pushed to positions in a semi-circle around Epfig. Resistance suddenly decreased, indicating that an armored thrust by Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division south from the vicinity of Barr, was causing the enemy to initiate withdrawals. Contact was established between the armor and infantry troops of the 411th Regiment. The Corps Commander then ordered the 103rd Division to follow Combat Command A south along the axis Barr-Selestat to mop up in the wake of the armor.

Through the Ste. Marie Pass to Selestat

At the beginning of the November offensive the 36th Division, holding the right flank of VI Corps from St. Leonard south to Gerardmer made its preparations for a crossing of the Meurthe River, as the 143rd Infantry seized and occupied the ridge overlooking Anould and Clefcy

on 20 November. The next day the 143rd Regiment moved north to cross the river near St. Leonard. The swollen stream and heavy enemy fire made the crossing difficult. The regimental right flank received one 60 round artillery concentration in four minutes. Farther south elements of the 141st Infantry crossed the Meurthe near Clefcy, moving through a heavily mined area to occupy the town. Advance elements reached the high ground south of Fraize the same day.

On 22 November the enemy showed increasing aggressiveness in attempting to prevent an enlargement of the bridgehead. The 143rd Infantry, slowed by heavy fire, minefields, and booby traps, made only minor gains toward its objective, the high ground north of Fraize. The 141st Regiment resumed its assault on the wooded hill mass south of Fraize. An enemy counterattack at 1030 hours drove the infantry back to Clefcy for reorganization; and, after unsuccessful attempts to regain lost ground, the regiment withdrew to the west bank of the Meurthe to prepare for an attack on the following day through positions of the 143rd Infantry. On 23 November the 143rd cleared Mandray, north of Fraize. Both assault regiments closed in on enemy positions at Fraize, where stiff resistance was encountered. On 23 November the 36th Division was directed by corps operations instructions to seize Ste. Marie, prepared to continue the advance to Selestat or to assemble at Saales to follow the attack of the 3rd and 100th Divisions.

The 142nd Infantry was assigned the mission of spearheading the division drive through the Vosges. The 1st Battalion of the 142nd Regiment, motorized, passed through the 143rd east of Mandray during the night 23-24 November to follow the road to La Croix-Aux-Mines, then north to the road junction town of Ban-de-Laveline as an objective. Before noon on 24 November the battalion had cleared La Croix and entered Ban-de-Laveline. The 2nd Battalion, driving to the north along the east bank of the Meurthe through Saulcy and Ste. Marguerite, pushed east to clear the area northwest of Ban-de-Laveline.

With Ban-de-Laveline in the regiment's hands, plans were formulated for a drive on Ste. Marie. The 3rd Battalion of the 142nd Infantry, which had assembled in Ban-de-Laveline, was to break into two forces — one following the main road to Ste. Marie and the other

flanking the town from the northeast. The Germans were ready on the more obvious approach through the Ste. Marie Pass. Here a strong roadblock of timber and rocks was defended by approximately 100 troops armed with automatic weapons and two antitank guns.

The flanking column of the 3rd Battalion, achieved a complete surprise by coming in on the town from the north side and rear. Germans were encountered riding bicycles and vehicles in the streets. One hundred and fifty prisoners were taken, while the force suffered only two casualties from minor wounds. Artillery and mortar fire was placed on the enemy roadblock holding up the frontal force. Finally, Company L came behind the main defenses and cleared the sector, taking 28 prisoners and killing an equal number. By 2240 hours on 25 November the engineers had opened the road to Ste. Marie.

The fall of Ste. Marie was a major victory for the division. The town, surrounded by high mountains and resting in a narrow valley below the pass, controlled two important roads in the east, one to Selestat and one to Ribeauville. In addition it had been an important German supply base. Meanwhile the 143rd and the 141st Regiments were making only slight gains east and south of Ban-de-Laveline and Fraize.

Following the Ste. Marie-Selestat road along the valley of a small stream and mountain trails to the north, the 142nd Regimental Combat Team moved east from Ste. Marie the morning of 26 November. Roadblocks, heavily defended by armor and automatic weapons, and street fighting in mountain villages delayed the advance until strong-points were by-passed and the regiment launched a coordinated assault against the town of Liepvre. The 2nd Battalion was instructed to attack from mountain roads to the north. The 3rd Battalion was to go through the woods to attack Liepvre from the south, while the 1st Battalion was to exert pressure frontally. Artillery was to be used against enemy positions. By the morning of 28 November the 2nd Battalion reached Liepvre from the north and found the town clear.

Koenigsbourg Chateau, three miles southeast of Liepvre, sat high on dominating ground to command a wide view of the Rhine Valley and represented the next important regimental objective. At

1930 hours on 28 November the chateau was taken without a fight, the Germans having abandoned it several hours previously. Inspection of the castle fortifications with moats and thick walls revealed that the



TYPICAL OF THE NUMEROUS ROADBLOCKS ENCOUNTERED IN THE
VICINITY OF STE. MARIE PASS

" . . . Roadblocks, heavily defended by armor and automatic weapons, . . . delayed the advance . . . "

castle might have presented a formidable defense. Artillery observers could now look out from the tall tower and see enemy trains operating in the Alsace Plain. Long range artillery was brought to bear on them with good results. Mopping up near Liepvre took place on 29 November. Two hundred and fifteen prisoners were taken, including the commanding officer of the German 470th Reserve Battalion with the remnants of his unit. In the evening an advance was ordered east to Chatenois on the approaches to Selestat. On 30 November Company K of the 142nd Regiment seized high ground above Chatenois. From here artillery fire

could be placed on targets plainly seen in the valley below. An attack was planned on Chatenois for the morning of 1 December.

While the 142nd Infantry was pushing through the Ste. Marie Pass to Selestat, the 143rd Regiment was engaged in mopping up activities to the rear to eliminate enemy troops who were harassing the 142nd supply route. After organizing positions on high ground to protect the Fraize-Ban-de-Laveline roads, the regiment advanced east up rugged hill masses to occupy a ridge overlooking the Ste. Marie-Le Bonhomme road on 27 November. During the next two days troops moved south up the valley toward Le Bonhomme. Resistance was light. Only one of three pillboxes located contained enemy troops.

To the right and rear of the 143rd, the 141st Infantry had been engaged in clearing enemy pockets along the Anould-Fraize-Plainfaing approach to Le Bonhomme. On 24 November Companies F and C occupied Fraize. Some opposition was encountered from the enemy on a ridge southeast of the town and from self-propelled gunfire from Plainfaing. Information received from prisoners indicated that the enemy was withdrawing from Fraize to Plainfaing and from there planned to withdraw east to Le Bonhomme. During the night of 25-26 November patrols from Company L entered Plainfaing and found it clear. During the next few days the regiment advanced east to gain high ground overlooking Le Bonhomme near the Bonhomme Pass. On 29 November it was reported that Le Bonhomme had been evacuated by the enemy.

Armor Pushes South on the Alsace Plain

Following the capture of Strasbourg two armored forces were committed to clear the Alsace Plain south of the city, Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division and the 2nd French Armored Division. Combat Command A had been attached to VI Corps on 19 November, had assembled in a corps designated area on the following day, and on 21 November had commenced movement on corps order along the route Rambervillers-Baccaret-Blamont-Cirey, then to turn southeast down the valley road toward Schirmeck. The objective of this movement was

to block enemy forces withdrawing from the VI Corps front to the northeast. On 22 November Combat Command A was attached to XV Corps, as the armor moved through its sector. Three days later the American combat command made contact with 3rd Division troops north of Schirmeck and once again was attached to VI Corps. At noon it received instructions to reorganize, prepared to move on corps order in multiple columns along the Schirmeck-Mutzig highway and the network of roads to the south to seize the Erstein-Benfeld area in the Alsace Plain.

On 27 November Combat Command A moved from Schirmeck to the Alsace Plain, one column passing through Obernai and reaching the vicinity of Barr. Another column moved southeast to clear Valff, while a third column fanned out to the east from the main axis of advance to sweep toward Erstein. Late in the day the corps commander issued a directive to Combat Command A to clear all roads in the Erstein-Benfeld sector so that the 2nd French Armored Division could attack through the area on 28 November. The primary function of the American Combat Command was then to confine its attack south along the Obernai-Selestat route and to block off the roads leading out of the Vosges.

American armor encountered strong resistance on 28 November, indicating that the enemy had thrown in fresh troops in an effort to extricate the 19th Army. On the east flank an armored infantry column, the 62nd Battalion Combat Team, which had penetrated to a point north of Erstein, was heavily counterattacked. The loss of three half tracks, two M4 tanks, ten trucks and trailers, and one 57mm gun in addition to personnel casualties forced a withdrawal of three miles to the west of the Strasbourg-Benfeld highway. Armored elements of the 25th Battalion Combat Team, attacking south in the road network between Valff and Barr, received two counterattacks, forcing a withdrawal to the north back toward Obernai. The 48th Battalion Combat Team circled to the north of Barr, where contact was made with 103rd division troops. Heavy fighting developed in the town of Barr, as enemy bazooka teams from basement positions in the houses of the narrow streets blasted American tanks. Nine medium tanks were knocked out, and eight were missing from a platoon believed to have been cut off. The column withdrew to the north of Barr for the night.

On 29 November Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division attacked south in two columns along the eastern fringe of the Vosges. Blown bridges, minefields, and stubborn infantry opposition supported by antitank and artillery fire kept gains to a minimum. To the east of the Molsheim-Selestat highway one column, the 26th Battalion, advancing to the south, was delayed by wrecked vehicles on the roads but by 30 November entered St. Pierre, where heavy fighting took place until early afternoon before the town was completely cleared and occupied. The enemy threw in automatic weapons fire and 150mm artillery fire from the south. A blown bridge in St. Pierre held up progress. To the west of the main highway the 48th Battalion in column again attacked south to Barr, where enemy small arms and machine gun resistance was overcome. Recovering eight medium tanks in serviceable condition the column pressed south one mile against only sniper fire but was stopped by a mine field covered by machine gun and artillery fire from high ground. Between Andlau and St. Pierre blown bridges halted forward movement. On 1 December Combat Command A was ordered to assemble in its present location in corps reserve.

On 27 November the French 2nd Armored Division had been relieved from attachment to XV Corps and attached to VI Corps. French Armored troops were on that date being relieved by the 3rd Division and were preparing to attack south from Strasbourg down the west side of the Rhine Valley. On 28 November the French jumped off from Strasbourg in two main columns with Combat Command D on the left and Combat Command R on the right, each column being followed by a reserve combat command. The left column advanced without opposition to a point somewhat over a mile south of Plobsheim, where it was held up temporarily by a blown bridge. The right column reached Erstein where stubborn resistance was encountered. Combat Command R assembled to the west in the Obernai-Valff area and drove to the south toward the Strasbourg-Selestat-Colmar highway.

Several towns were occupied and cleared of enemy forces on 29 November, including Erstein; and repeated counterattacks were repulsed. Activities in all sectors were seriously hampered by bridges which the enemy had destroyed. The advance was directed south along

both sides of the Ill River, but the main effort was made between the Ill and the Rhine. New gains were made on 30 November. Combat Command D, striking south along the Rhine River road against heavy opposition, destroyed five Mark V tanks, one 75mm self-propelled gun, five 88mm antitank guns, killed 50 of the enemy and took 350 prisoners. On 1 and 2 December this combat command reached as far as Friesenheim, which it captured after destroying enemy guns and tanks in a day-long fight. Combat Command R on the division right flank reached Kogenheim on the Strasbourg-Selestat highway southwest of Benfeld and seized the town on 1 December. Here blown bridges over the Ill River halted the advance. Benfeld, now almost completely encircled, was occupied without opposition. Combat Command V, which had been following the eastern column down the Rhine River road, moved west then south toward Herbsheim between the other two commands. The advance on Herbsheim was halted, however, during the night 1-2 December by heavy antitank, mortar, and small arms fire. On 2 December, attacking first with armored infantry and then with the bulk of the armor, Combat Command V cleared and occupied Herbsheim at a cost of 65 casualties in one company and very bitter fighting.

During these early days in December medium caliber artillery fire coming from Germany across the Rhine harassed the units of the 2nd French Armored Division in their advance south. On the night of 23 December troops of the French armored division, encountering very heavy interdictory artillery fire, took up positions on an arc from southeast of Kogenheim to south of Herbsheim to Friesenheim and held firm awaiting corps orders. It was apparent that the enemy was unifying his defensive organization in the vicinity of Colmar and was demolishing bridges and preparing antitank defenses to lessen the efficacy of Allied armor.

The Fall of Selestat

The town of Selestat on the Ill River with a population of over 11,000 was the junction of several important roads including the main Strasbourg-Colmar highway. By the beginning of December the 103rd

and the 36th Divisions were closing in on Selestat from the north and from the west.

Having advanced through the Vosges passes to Barr, from which it turned to the south, the 103rd Division attacked on 1 December with three regiments abreast against light and scattered enemy resistance. The 411th Infantry on the left had occupied Epfig during the night and now attacked south and southeast with the armored support of Combat Command A to occupy Ebersheim. On 2 December Combat Command A was withdrawn to corps reserve. The 410th Infantry remained near Epfig to clear the enemy from surrounding villages. On the right flank of the division the 409th Regiment cleared Dambach-La-Ville and attacked south to make contact with the 36th Division in the vicinity of Scherwiller. Preparations were now made to launch a coordinated two-divisional assault against Selestat.

By midnight, 1-2 December, elements of the 1st Battalion of the 409th Infantry had advanced to the railroad tracks in the northern part of town; and house to house fighting took place. On 2 December the 409th with the 1st and 2nd Battalions abreast met sporadic but stiff resistance in the walled section of Selestat. An old city wall which forms a semi-circle in the northern part of the town served as a barrier against penetration. Resistance took the form of armor, artillery, mortar, and automatic weapon fire, as well as roadblocks heavily protected by concentrations of fire power. The enemy defended with tenacity and succeeded in cutting off one infantry company.

The fight for Selestat continued on 3 December, as the two assault battalions of the 409th Infantry advanced house by house and block by block in the northern half of the city. Houses converted into enemy strongpoints were first fired upon by tank destroyers after which infantry rushed in to mop up. Shortly after mid-day an estimated 150 enemy supported by tanks launched a counterattack from the eastern outskirts of the city; but, after an hour of heavy fighting in which severe casualties were suffered from tank fire, the attack was beaten off. The infantry company which had been cut off the previous day also lost approximately half its personnel to tank fire. During the day contact

was maintained with troops of the 36th Division who were already fighting in the southeastern part of Selestat.

Elements of the 36th Division represented the second prong of the coordinated assault on Selestat. At the beginning of December the division had been engaged on a 22 mile front on the corps right flank. The 141st Infantry was on high ground overlooking Le Bonhomme; the 142nd was continuing its spearhead move from Liepvre to Selestat; while the 143rd held the front between the other two regiments. On 1 December the 143rd Infantry had attacked toward the Ste. Marie-Ribeauville road and toward Ribeauville southwest of Selestat. On 3



**EASTERN SECTOR OF SELESTAT FLOODED BY HIGH WATER
FROM THE RHINE**

"... During the day contact was maintained with troops of the 36th Division who were already fighting in the southeastern part of Selestat . . ."

December the 143rd Regiment less one battalion occupied Ribeauville. The 142nd Regiment on 1 December had cleared and occupied Chatenois just outside Selestat, while other elements of the regiment cleared

several towns to the southwest in the foothills of the Vosges. Troops of the 142nd assaulted Selestat from the west, reached the railroad, and cut the main road to Colmar before midnight. The 2nd Battalion of the 143rd, was now attached to the 142nd Regiment for the assault on Selestat.

Four battalions converged on Selestat. Two battalions of the 409th Infantry were already fighting in the northern part of the city; the 2nd Battalion of the 143rd advanced directly east from Chatenois; while the 3rd Battalion of the 142nd moved on Selestat from the south. On 2 December the 2nd Battalion of the 143rd engaged the enemy in a heavy fire fight in the city and encountered machine gun and small arms fire, booby traps, mines, and trip wires. An enemy battalion command post was taken and three German staff officers captured. The 3rd Battalion of the 142nd Infantry, having crossed to the east of the Colmar highway, moved out to attack the southeastern sector of Selestat at 0630 hours on 2 December. The advance was made against intense sniper fire. At 1600 hours, an enemy column of 150 men moving toward Selestat from the southeast was dispersed by artillery fire.

On 2 December Company K led the 3rd Battalion in clearing the southeast corner of the town and reached a bridge over the Ill River which the Germans had blown. Heavy fire stopped the advance. On the next day Company E of the 409th Infantry reached the Ill River and fanned to the south to make contact with the 3rd Battalion of the 142nd Regiment. By 1645 hours on 4 December the city was completely occupied. Troops of the 103rd Division were relieved during the night by the 142nd Infantry, and control of the city passed to the 36th Division. The 103rd Division prepared to move north to the new VI Corps front.

The Seventh Army Turns North

In the last ten days of November VI Corps had penetrated the High Vosges and poured out its troops on the plains of Alsace. In military history the Vosges had been considered impregnable. However, as the enemy withdrew troops from the Vosges line to block the Allied

advances north and south through the Saverne Pass and the Belfort Gap, mountain obstacles defended by insufficient manpower were broken by American infantry. General Brooks, VI Corps Commander, gave full credit to the 100th, 3rd, 103rd, and 36th Infantry Divisions and to the 14th Armored Division for their achievement in cracking the enemy Vosges line.

That the enemy fully appreciated the threat which the Vosges drive represented, although possibly somewhat late, is evident from captured documents. On 21 November General Thumm, Commanding the LXIV Corps, which was opposing the VI Corps advance, issued to his soldiers an order of the day in which he called upon them to fight, "standing at the borders of our fatherland," for the life of the people, the life of the soldier's family, and the life of Germany." Five days later General Thumm issued a message to all commanders in his area relaying the order of the German High Command:

The order to hold out to the last man must be executed under all circumstances

Great decisions are falling here now. I expect all commanders, leaders and troops to hold out, not to lose their nerves, and fight to the last breath . . . The decision falls on this side of the Rhine

Although by the beginning of December his Vosges line had been broken and Allied troops had reached the Rhine both at Mulhouse and at Strasbourg, the enemy gave no indication of a general withdrawal from the area between these two Alsatian cities. The liquidation of the Colmar Pocket was to be made as costly as possible for the Allies. It also represented a potential threat to the entire Seventh Army, as that army faced the Siegfried Line north of Strasbourg.

It has been mentioned that the Seventh Army had prepared plans for a crossing of the Rhine to be made presumably in December to the north of Strasbourg, and that this plan was at least temporarily abandoned on 24 November, when General Eisenhower in his direction of operations along the full western front changed both the mission of the Seventh Army and its direction of advance. In the new strategy Seventh Army was to swing north astride the Vosges and west of the Rhine and, in an advance coordinated with the activities of the Third Army, was to breach the Siegfried Line between Lauterbourg on the

Rhine and Saarbruecken. The main objective of all Allied armies was to destroy the enemy west of the Rhine.

Instructions from Sixth Army Group issued on 26 November elaborated the new plan of operations for its two armies. The First French Army was assigned the mission of protecting the army group flank along the west bank of the Rhine when destruction of the enemy in its zone had been completed. This zone was to reach from Strasbourg south to Switzerland and include the Colmar Pocket. It was at this time planned that units of the Seventh Army to be employed in clearing the Colmar Pocket would be relieved by the French by 0600 hours on 30 November. The American Seventh Army was instructed to complete regrouping rapidly, to attack north with the least possible delay and assist the Third Army in breaching the Siegfried Line. After it had completed this mission, advantage was to be taken of any opportunity to seize and exploit an unopposed bridgehead across the Rhine south of Mannheim.

In a staff memorandum of 25 November Seventh Army had announced to its corps commanders that at present, "no crossing of the Rhine River is contemplated and the direction of advance will be turned north . . . generally parallel to the Rhine." On the following day this change in the tactical plan was made the subject of a letter on future operations. After destruction of the enemy in zone Seventh Army was to regroup with XV Corps west of the crest of the Vosges and with VI Corps east of the Vosges. The 2nd French Armored Division was to pass to the control of the First French Army. With many of its divisions heavily engaged in the line Seventh Army had to complete its regrouping with deliberation and care to avoid jeopardy to its units on the front and to its flanks. On 26 November the boundary between VI Corps and XV Corps was moved to the north of Strasbourg, the beginning of the swing to the left. On that day the 100th Infantry Division was relieved from VI Corps, to assemble still west of the Vosges for attachment to XV Corps.

The Seventh Army Command Post closed at Epinal on 30 November and reopened in Sarrebourg in anticipation of the new direction of advance. An amendment to army directions left up to

VI Corps the size of the force to be used in clearing the Molsheim-Colmar area, this force to be withdrawn to the corps zone on army order and not necessarily on 30 November. Enemy resistance in the Colmar Pocket was greater than had been anticipated. On 2 December Seventh Army Field Order No. 7 listed the regrouping of units to be attached to each corps. By 5 December VI Corps was to be composed of the 3rd, 45th, 79th, and 103rd Infantry Divisions and the 14th Armored Division. XV Corps was to be composed of the 44th and the 100th Infantry Divisions and the 12th Armored Division. The 12th Armored Division,



MAJOR GENERAL
RODERICK R. ALLEN

"... arrived in the Luneville area..."

commanded by Major General Roderick R. Allen, was scheduled to arrive in the Luneville area on 1, 2, and 3 December. The 36th Infantry Division, still to be supplied and administered by Seventh Army, was to be operationally a part of the First French Army's liquidation of the Colmar Pocket. Seventh Army on 3 December planned the second shift in VI Corps - XV Corps boundary to be effective on 5 December. This line ran roughly along the crest of the Low Vosges from northwest of Saverne through Philippsbourg to the northeast, XV Corps on the left and VI Corps on the right.

Divisions completed movement in accordance with corps orders and the tactical situation. The month of December was to find the Seventh Army pushing along its new front through the Maginot Line and into Germany's Siegfried Line positions. On 8 December the Seventh Army's forward Command Post moved up to Saverne.

CHAPTER XIX

Northward to the German Frontier

WHEN on 23 November the Seventh Army drive reached through the Saverne Gap and up to the city of Strasbourg, the enemy threat to both flanks of the corridor was accentuated. In the south the enemy had yet to be driven out of the High Vosges, across the plain, and over the Rhine. To the north the Third Army was meeting stiff resistance as it attempted to cross the Sarre River, leaving Seventh Army troops above Sarrebourg exposed to strong German counterattacks. The long spearhead that had cleared the Saverne Gap and reached the Rhine was a narrow lane, tenuous and vulnerable on both its flanks.

When on 24 November General Eisenhower changed the Seventh Army's direction of advance, new plans were quickly formulated. While elements of the Seventh Army were to help the French in driving the Germans across the Rhine in the south, its main force was to drive northeast astride the Low Vosges and up the Rhine Valley. When it had cleared the enemy out of its zone which was bounded by the Rhine, the Siegfried Line, and the Sarre River, then the Seventh Army, in an action coordinated with the Third, would break across the Siegfried Line into that part of Germany known as the Saar-Palatinate.

The New Front

The shifting of an army front, along large parts of which the enemy was being actively and at focal points intensively engaged, was a complicated maneuver. With full regard for tactical requirements disengagement, relief, and redeployment were accomplished in the last days of November; and by 5 December both XV and VI Corps were ready to launch the offensive to the north.

The German counterattacks north of Sarrebourg on 23, 24, and 25 November had been beaten back by the 44th Infantry Division, elements of the 45th Division, the 106th Cavalry Group, and units of the 4th Armored Division, operating with the Third Army, which entered the XV Corps zone north and south of Fenetrangle. At this time XV Corps operations were divided into the front east of the Vosges and the front west of the Vosges. The 79th Infantry Division, holding the corps right flank on the Alsace Plain north of Strasbourg, made limited objective attacks south and west of Haguenau during the last days of November. On 26-27 November the 45th Division was brought into the line east of the Vosges from positions north of Hochfelden on the left flank of the 79th Division west to the passes north of Saverne. One regiment of the 100th Infantry Division, transferred from VI to XV Corps for operations, was attached to the 45th Division on 27 November to strengthen protection of the Saverne Gap bridgehead.

On the corps flank west of the Vosges the 44th Division pushed the attack to the north. After German strength near Rauwiller had been broken, the advance was carried through against little opposition. During the last two days of November the 44th Division captured Tieffenbach; the 45th Division took Ingwiller and positions to the northeast; and Niederschaeffolsheim just southwest of Haguenau. By 3 December the 100th Division had been brought into the line between the 44th and 45th Divisions. Near Wingen-sur-Moder the newly arrived division encountered strong opposition. On the next day XV Corps made slight advances to the north, both east and west of the Vosges.

At 0001 hours on 5 December XV and VI Corps became operational on the new front, the boundary coinciding with that already in existence along the crest of the Low Vosges between the 45th and 100th Divisions. XV Corps was now composed of the 44th and 100th Infantry Divisions together with the newly attached 12th Armored Division and reconnaissance troops. In the VI Corps sector there was little immediate change. The 45th and 79th Divisions continued to advance on the line. The 14th Armored and 103rd Infantry Divisions were assembled in rear areas in preparation for a general offensive. The 3rd Infantry Division continued to hold Strasbourg and positions north

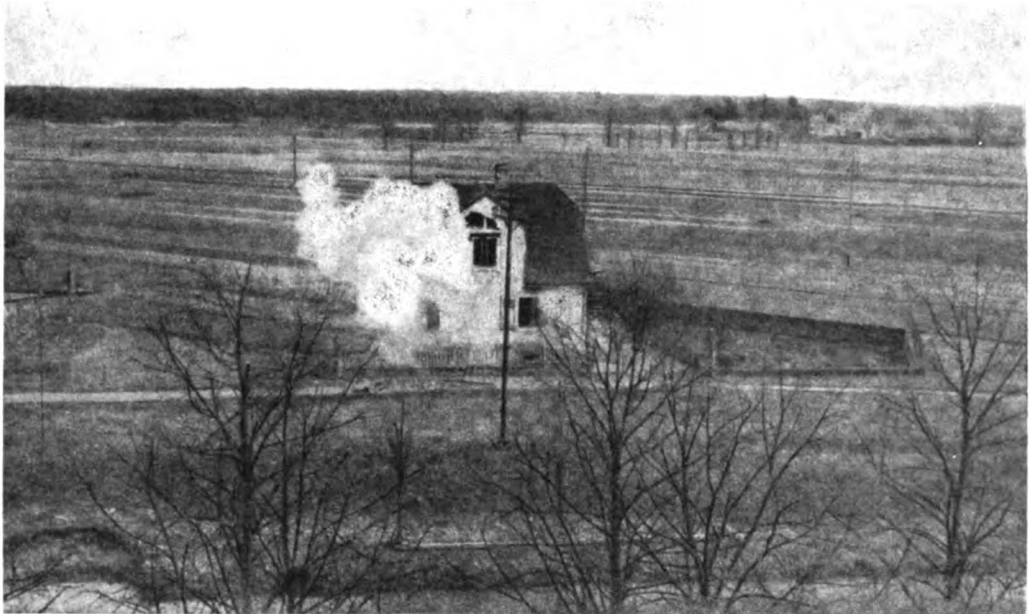
and south of that city. The 36th Division and the 2nd French Armored Division were relieved from attachment to VI Corps and remained in the line from Selestat to the Rhine River.

The change in the Seventh Army's direction of advance, which forfeited the possibility of a short-cut into the heart of Germany, meant giving the enemy time. Although the breakthrough to Strasbourg had split the German First and Nineteenth Armies and weakened both, the First Army in the north was still strong enough to resist the Seventh Army's new drive. Between 15 and 30 November the Germans facing the Seventh Army had lost an estimated 17,500 troops, 13,000 of which number had been taken prisoner of war. Now, in the beginning of December, they had only about 14,000 troops with which to fight a delaying action against seven American divisions. Replacements numbered about 10,500; many were converts from rear echelons, and many were looking for an opportunity to surrender. But the enemy was able to gain sufficient time for other forces to increase the strength of the West Wall.

The Germans had on their side the advantages of weather and terrain. December in Alsace is a cloudy month with low ground fogs and drizzling rain. On only five days of the month was the Tactical Air Force able to give close support to the Seventh Army drive. The ground is cold with frosts, but not sufficiently frozen to support heavy vehicles. Both the softness of the ground and natural terrain obstacles slowed up American armor and put the burden of the advance upon the infantry.

The Germans were to utilize the natural obstacles of both the Alsace Plain and the Lower Vosges Mountains in their withdrawal to the north. The plain, a rolling stretch of farm land, slopes generally to the northeast. It is broken in the center by the great Haguenau Forest, 18 miles long and six miles deep. Between the forest and the Rhine a three-mile-wide corridor narrows as it runs northward to the town of Seltz. Between the forests and the Vosges there is a gap of six miles; but it is broken by rivers, the Moder, the Zintzel, the Falkenstein, and the Seltzbach, and a dense network of villages. To the north lies the rugged country of the Hochwald, and above the Hochwald the Lauter River flows to the Rhine and forms the German border. Bounding the plain on the

west are the wooded and steep eastern flanks of the Lower Vosges, or Hardt Mountains. On the western side they slope more gradually toward the Sarre Valley. Along the steep roads and trails of the Vosges the

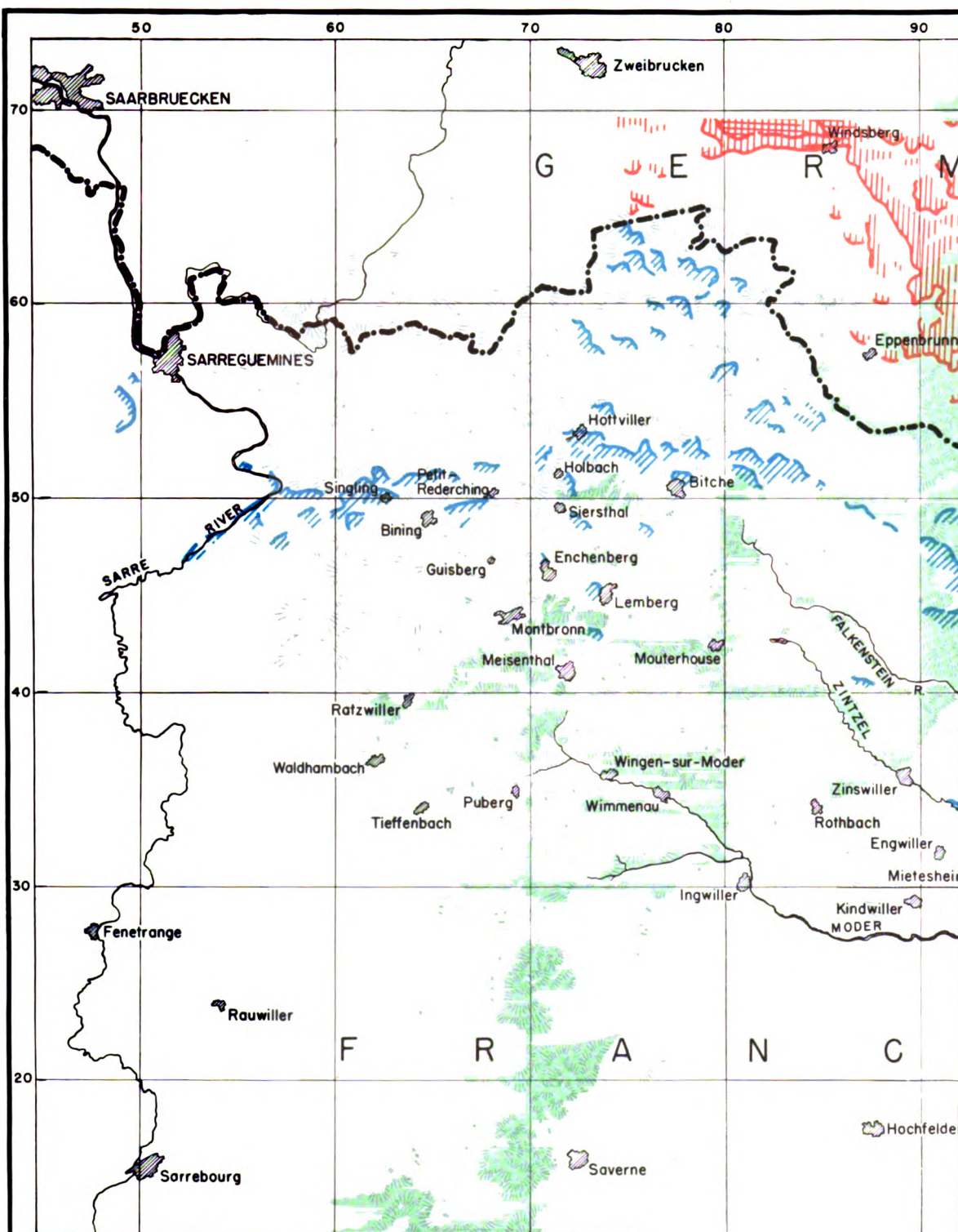


THIS HOUSE HAS BEEN BLASTED BY A BAZOOKA SHELL IN AN ATTEMPT TO ROUT SNIPERS. IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE HAGENAU FOREST

" . . . It is broken in the center by the great Hagenau Forest, 18 miles long and six miles deep . . . "



Germans prepared roadblocks and mines. After the counterattacks they launched late in November south toward Sarrebourg, they planned their strongest delaying actions in the towns in the two passes cut by the Moder and the Zintzel Rivers. Here at Wingen on the Moder and at Lemberg and Enchenberg, in the valley west of the sources of the Zintzel, they were to fight stubbornly.

On the plain and through the mountains the Germans were to defend road blocks and towns and, when forced, to withdraw behind minefields and blown bridges to the most defensible point. Seventh



SIEGFRIED MAGINOT LINES

LEGEND

 Fortified Area
 Heavily Fortified Woods

Maginot Line in Blue
 Siegfried Line in Red

Miles 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

80 90

Army G-2 anticipated the plans of German defense and foresaw also that the enemy would make a stand either at the Maginot Line or at the Siegfried Line.



FORTIFICATIONS IN THE BITCHE SECTION OF THE MAGINOT LINE

"... Even more probably the enemy would try to hold in the Ensemble de Bitche, the toughest fortifications of the entire Maginot Line ..."

The Maginot Line runs north along the Rhine from Strasbourg to Ft. Louis, where it bends to the northwest through the Haguenau Forest to Riedseltz near Wissembourg. There it bends to the west and runs through the Hochwald, parallel to the German border, through Lembach and Bitche. Here the Maginot Line runs through rougher terrain and was more likely to be chosen by the Germans for a stand than the French defenses in the Rhine Valley. Even more probably the enemy would try to hold in the Ensemble de Bitche, the toughest fortifications of the entire Maginot Line. Bitche stands at the head of the Lower Vosges in France, on the step made in the mountain line as

it turns northeastward into Germany. North of Bitche the forests thin out into open country and the hills become lower and spread out. Bitche guards the junction of the road and railroad from Haguenau to Sarreguemines and the roads south from Zweibruecken and Pirmasens into France. It has always been a strong point in the French national defenses; here in the 17th century Vauban built a long fort, and the Camp de Bitche had been for a long time a strong garrison.

Aerial photographs showed few signs of German preparatory activity in the Maginot Line, except for scattered digging in the mountains and around Bitche. Evidently the Germans planned to use the Maginot Line only to delay the attack, while they withdrew across the border to their own Siegfried Line. Here photographs showed intensive preparations in key sectors. That part of the Siegfried Line which was the target of the Seventh Army runs from Neuberg on the Rhine westward to Zweibruecken: from the Rhine through Buchelberg in the Bien Wald, across open country from Stainfeld to Ober-Otterbach, through the forests of the Hardt or Low Vosges Mountains to Bunden-thal and Eppenbrunn, then across open country again northwest to Windsberg, and west to Zweibruecken. The largest concentrations of artillery emplacements appeared from the aerial photographs to be in the two open stretches.

Such were the enemy plans, as Seventh Army G-2 estimated them on 7 December: to delay in successive positions back to the Siegfried Line, and there to stand. During the first few days of the month the enemy had organized his forces above the Moder River. Defending the Plain were the 245th Infantry and the 256th Volks Grenadier Divisions, which had been added to the 361st Volks Grenadier Division, now operating in the eastern part of the Hardt Mountains. On the western slopes of the mountains were elements of both the 130th Panzer and the 25th Panzer Grenadier Divisions.

The American drive north began on 5 December, when both forces, now reorganized and committed to definite missions, faced each other along the general line of the Moder River. Seventh Army's plan, as it evolved through a series of orders, was a double drive, XV Corps

17

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on the left and VI Corps on the right. This double drive became, in effect, a six-pronged offensive with six divisions lined up from west to east, the 44th, the 100th, the 45th, the 103rd, the 14th Armored, and the 79th,



**79TH DIVISION ARTILLERYMEN FIRING INTO THE GERMAN
POSITIONS OVER THE MODER RIVER**

" . . . Both forces, now reorganized and committed to definite missions, faced each other along the general line of the Moder River . . . "

probing into the enemy defenses. The Seventh Army pushed the enemy back to the fortifications of the Maginot and then the Siegfried Line.

The 45th Division through the Low Vosges

On the VI Corps front four divisional lines of advance developed, but at the beginning of the drive north the 45th and 79th Divisions contained the entire line. On 7 and 13 December, respectively, the 103rd and 14th Armored Divisions drove as a wedge between the widening fronts of the other two divisions. During the month of

December the 45th Division advanced up the western side of the Alsace Maginot Line at Lembach, and across the German border to Nothweiler and Bobenthal.

The attack of the 45th Division toward Lembach was long and hard. Facing it was open, rolling terrain, studded with villages where the Germans made strong delaying stands. The division had not only to encircle and clear villages along a six-mile front but also to block the mountain passes on its left. "Demolitions, mines, and well covered road blocks became more numerous as the enemy withdrew toward the old Maginot Line; and increased artillery, mortar, self-propelled, and



**ENGINEERS SWEEPING FOR MINES IN ONE OF THE MANY
ROADBLOCKS WHICH SLOWED UP THE ADVANCE**

"... Demolitions, mines, and well covered roadblocks became more numerous as the enemy withdrew toward the old Maginot Line ..."

machine gun fire with superior observation made the entrance into Germany and attack on the Siegfried Line difficult . . ." By 1 December

the division had begun its attack across the Moder and had taken Ingwiller and Kindwiller. It was then ordered to advance to seize the railroad line which runs from Niederbronn to Mertzwiller. On 3 December, Major General Robert T. Frederick, who had commanded the Airborne Task Force in the invasion of southern France, assumed command of the 45th Division. A few days before, General Eagles, who had commanded the division since 21 November 1943, had been wounded when his vehicle exploded a mine.

On the division left flank the 157th Infantry had begun its drive along the edge of the wooded mountains, protected to the west by the 397th Infantry of the 100th Division, then blocking the passes at Wimmenau and Rothbach. Resistance stiffened at Zinswiller. On 1 and 2 December the 157th Regiment fought for and took the hills on the east and west sides of the town; and on 3 December against bitter opposition troops took the town itself and blocked it off. The next day two battalions seeking to reach Niederbronn over open country were pinned down by heavy fire from the outskirts of the town. The 3rd Battalion, however, secured the left flank by surrounding and taking a village on the southwestern approaches to Niederbronn, as it engaged in stiff fighting in the western hills. For the following three days the regiment made little progress; but it blocked the roads in its zone and felt out the enemy defenses of Niederbronn, its objective. On 8 December the 1st Battalion led the attack. The first day's fighting was futile but on the following day the 1st Battalion secured ground to the west and north and fought its way into the town. With the support of the 2nd Battalion troops cleared Niederbronn by mid-afternoon of 9 December.

Meanwhile, the 179th and the 180th Infantry were fighting through the center of the gap between the Haguenau Forest and the Vosges. Engwiller and Mietenheim held them up for two days. On 2 December the 1st Battalion of the 179th Infantry resumed the regimental attack on Engwiller. The enemy stiffly resisted from within the town subjecting the battalion to intense small arms and mortar fire. At the end of the day a portion of the town was still in enemy hands, as the other two battalions moved up on the flanks. By the next day troops were able to continue the attack to the north and to cross the Zintzel

River. The 180th Infantry had an even more difficult engagement at Mietesheim. Having reached the outskirts of the town on 1 December, the 3rd Battalion entered Mietesheim from the west and south and after bitter street fighting cleared the lower half of the town. Early in the afternoon enemy infantry and tank counterattacks drove the 3rd Battalion back to the outskirts of the village. On 2 December the attack was resumed against stubborn resistance. Mietesheim was cleared of the enemy and blocked off.

The 45th Division was held up in its advance along the western flank by trouble in the east. After the fall of Mietesheim the 2nd Battalion of the 180th Regiment began to patrol and to prepare for an attack on the division right flank to take Mertzwiller at the eastern end of the divisional front. It attacked on 5 December from the south and the west; and by noon it had cleared the southern half of Mertzwiller up to the Zintzel River bridge, which the Germans had blown. In the afternoon two companies crossed the Zintzel River in the face of heavy fire and occupied positions along the railroad lines. On the next day, however, German infantrymen supported by tanks swept back into Mertzwiller and forced a withdrawal to the southern half of the town. During the night of 7-8 December units of the 103rd Division relieved all committed elements of the 180th Infantry at Mertzwiller.

Freed of the burden of too wide a line, the 45th Division drove northward toward Gundershoffen and Reichshoffen, the two most important towns between Mertzwiller and Niederbronn on the railway line and along the Zintzel River. The 179th and 180th Infantry felt out in patrol action the strong defenses of both towns during 8 and 9 December. At 0530 hours on 10 December the 180th Infantry attacked through forward positions of the 179th with two battalions abreast, meeting scattered artillery and mortar fire. One column pushed armor across the railroad bridge at Reichshoffen and assaulted the town from the north and south. Mines, snipers, and machine gun fire opposed the advance; but enemy forces were too thinly spread and the town was quickly taken. Another column crossed the river at Gundershoffen against small arms and self-propelled gun fire and in the afternoon seized the town after an exchange of small arms, machine gun fire, and grenades.

Having taken its first objective, the Niederbronn-Mertzwiller railroad, the 45th Division then moved north on a narrower front through wooded mountains toward the Maginot Line. Nowhere was enemy resistance as severe as it had been on the plain. The advance was impeded more by Schu and Topf minefields and rugged country than by arms. In order to keep supplies coming forward units of the 45th Division even resorted to pack-trains. Although the Germans fought strong delaying actions in the woods about Lembach, utilizing some Maginot Line fortifications and opposing the advance with sniper and small arms fire, Lembach itself was easily taken on 14 December by units of the 180th Infantry. On 16 December advance elements of the division crossed the German border, cleared Bobenthal and Nothweiler, and established contact with fortifications of the Siegfried Line.

The 79th Division Along the Rhine

The 79th Division drive did not get started until 7 December. On that day the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, attached to the division to secure its right flank, attacked the town of Gamsheim near the Rhine. Also on 7 December units of the 103rd Division relieved left flank forces of the 79th Division, as the front narrowed for the assault. On that day, too, the 79th Division issued orders in compliance with VI Corps plans for a major attack toward the Siegfried Line.

Gamsheim had been held as a German strongpoint since the fall of Strasbourg, standing as a threat to any Seventh Army advance north along the Rhine. It took the 94th Cavalry troops a day and a half to capture Gamsheim. Once it was neutralized, however, the right flank of the 79th Division was cleared for movement. During the first several days of December the division had moved slowly up toward the Moder River. It had taken Schweighausen to flank Haguenau on the west, and it had secured positions along the southern edge of the woods, which like an arm of the Haguenau Forest flanks Haguenau. From here it could attack both Haguenau and Bischwiller to the south. After the 94th Cavalry together with elements of the 14th Armored Division had

cleared Gamsheim and moved up the Rhine southeast of Haguenau, the 79th Division began its drive.

It was to attack with three regiments abreast along the axis Bischwiller-Seltz to destroy the Rhine bridges and clear the Rhine Valley on its right flank; it was also to take the city of Haguenau on its left and, with the assistance of the 103rd Division, to clear Haguenau Forest. On 9 December Bischwiller fell easily to the 313th Infantry, which had surprised the enemy by attacking at dawn with no artillery preparation. German soldiers at the main bridge across the Moder River to the north side of town were shot as they were about to detonate prepared charges.



THE NORTHERN SECTOR OF BISCHWILLER WHICH IS UNDER ARTILLERY FIRE FROM GERMAN POSITIONS IN OBERHOFFEN

"... On 9 December Bischwiller fell easily to the 313th Infantry, which had surprised the enemy by attacking at dawn with no artillery preparation . . ."

Attacking forces pressed on across the Moder and dug in east of the river. The 315th Infantry had jumped off that same morning toward

Kaltenhouse on the southern outskirts of Haguenau. By evening it had cleared the woods in its zone and had dug in before Marienthal. The next morning Marienthal was taken; but, when the bridge over the Moder south of Haguenau was found blown, troops retraced their steps and went down to Bischwiller to cross the river and to follow the 313th Regiment north and east.

The 314th Infantry had a far more difficult time. Haguenau, a city with a peacetime population of from 15,000 to 20,000, was strongly defended. If the Germans could delay the left flank of the 79th Division drive here, as they had delayed the right flank of the 45th Division at



THE BITTERLY CONTESTED TOWN OF HAGUENAU UNDER
AMERICAN MORTAR FIRE

" . . . The 314th Infantry had a far more difficult time. Haguenau, a city with a peacetime population of from 15,000 to 20,000, was strongly defended . . . "

Mertzwiller, they would hold up the entire offensive in the plain. The regimental plan was for an attack by three battalions up through the

arm of the Haguenau Forest and into the city from the southwest and southeast. Reconnaissance troops were to guard the division left flank at Schweighausen. On 9 December the three battalions attacked against what their patrols had assured them would be strong resistance. It took two days and bitter fighting to clear the woods and to complete the occupation of Haguenau.

On 9 December the 314th Infantry had attacked at 1430 hours against heavy small arms, mortar, and artillery fire. By midnight troops had reached the southwestern edge of Haguenau. On the following day heavy opposition met the renewed attack, as enemy troops of the 481st Grenadier Regiment fired from well entrenched positions behind the railroad tracks on the western edge of the city. The 314th Regiment fought its way from house-to-house until resistance crumbled when the line at the railroad tracks was broken. On 11 December the regiment secured the town of Haguenau meeting only occasional sniper fire. The enemy had retreated to the north, blowing the bridge over the Moder behind them. That evening the 314th Infantry installed a Bailey bridge and continued the advance to Soufflenheim, at the southeastern edge of the city forest. Patrols of its reconnaissance troop reported that they had made no contact with the enemy in the Haguenau Forest. By this time the 313th Infantry had reached the defenses of Soufflenheim from the southwest; after a strongly contested engagement the enemy pulled out abruptly on 12 December, covering his withdrawal from Soufflenheim only by sniper fire and heavy harassing artillery fire. With the fall of Haguenau the Germans could not afford to make a stand in the Haguenau Forest, nor had they been able to hold the city long enough to seriously delay the advance of the 79th Division.

During the night of 11 December the three regiments of the division were converted into mobile combat teams; each, reinforced with armor, was to move to the northeast separately, while the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, now attached to the division, was to clear the towns along the right flank on the Rhine. The cavalry had little trouble all the way up to the border. The 313th Infantry sent out two spears toward the Siegfried Line. The 314th, exhausted from the battle of Haguenau, remained in mobile reserve.

On 12 December the 313th Regiment, on the right, drove from Soufflenheim toward Seltz at the head of the corridor between the forest and the Rhine. It took the southern half of the town that evening, against stiff resistance; and on the evening of the following day it got its armor across the swift Seltzbach River and cleared the northern half. A rifleman shot a civilian who was signalling two German tanks that an American bazooka team was approaching them. Now out of the corridor on the open plain, the regiment drove on 14 December north-east toward Lauterbourg where it drew heavy fire of all kinds from the outskirts. The troops stopped and dug in for the night.

It was suspected that the enemy would make a last strong delaying stand at Lauterbourg before withdrawing to the Siegfried Line. German troops and tanks had been seen moving into the town. At 0550 hours on 15 December the 1st Battalion attacked from the west in the face of artillery fire, while the 2nd Battalion attacked from the south over boggy ground. Both battalions reached the town at about the same time, and against stiff house-to-house resistance they drove the enemy north across the Lauter River. During the afternoon and evening they were pounded by artillery from the German side of the river, which they could find no way of crossing. The only bridge which would carry vehicles had been completely destroyed. Night patrols were able, however, to probe along the river; and on the morning of 16 December engineers installed a bridge and got tanks across. That afternoon the 1st Battalion crossed and moved up to take Berg against only very light resistance. On the next day the other two battalions moved up. They passed beyond Berg into the Bien Wald where they ran into heavy fire from the Siegfried Line.

The other spear of the 79th Division reached the Siegfried Line at about the same time. On 12 December the 3rd Battalion of the 313th Infantry had moved from Soufflenheim up through Haguenau Forest to Niederroedern on the northern bank of the Seltzbach River. Although the bridge had been blown and the river was too swift to ford, a few troops managed to get across to establish a toehold in the southern edge of the town, working around to cut the roads which lead to the north. On the following day the 3rd Battalion of the 315th Infantry

came up to take the town, relieving the 3rd Battalion of the 313th Regiment so that it might rejoin its parent organization on its march to Lauterbourg. Once a treadway bridge had been built over the Seltzbach, the 2nd Battalion of the 315th came up to Niederroedern and drove to the northeast across the open plain. No serious opposition was met until troops approached the village of Scheibenhardt on the German border. Below Scheibenhardt, in a semicircle, the troops dug in for the night. On the morning of 15 December they attacked and cleared the southern half of the town. During the afternoon patrols crossed the Lauter River into the northern half.

On the next day bridges were constructed against no opposition. The enemy had withdrawn to the Siegfried Line. All units of the regiment, which had now come up to Scheibenhardt crossed over into Ger-



**A PATROL OF THE 79TH DIVISION HAVING CROSSED THE BORDER
INTO GERMANY PREPARES TO ADVANCE**

*"... Now the entire 79th Division was across the border and ready to assault
Germany's line of fixed defenses ..."*

many. On 17 December the 314th Infantry came up to the center of the division line between the other two regiments and advanced through the Bien Wald to reach the outer defenses of the Siegfried Line. It dug in just below Buchelberg. Now the entire 79th Division was across the border and ready to assault Germany's line of fixed defenses.

The Corridor to Wissembourg

When, on 5 December, it became apparent that the German strength along the Moder below Haguenau Forest was too great for the 45th and the 79th Divisions to break swiftly, VI Corps ordered the 103rd Division to move in to help them. Its mission was to relieve the 45th's right flank in the vicinity of Mertzwiller and the 79th's left flank in the vicinity of Neubourg and to form a third spear in the drive northeast through the upper Alsace Plain.

According to the initial orders the 103rd Division was to attack across the Zintzel River at Mertzwiller, help the 79th Division clear the Haguenau Forest, and then move northeast across the upper plain toward Oberseebach. But new factors came into play. It was discovered that the enemy was not going to defend Haguenau Forest, and arrangements were made for the 14th Armored Division to cover the zone of open country that runs across the German border between the Vosges and the Bien Wald. Oberseebach lies in the center of this open country. At that time the direction of the 103rd Division attack was turned north toward Wissembourg, and its target became the high ground north of Berg-Zabern. It was to advance as a spear almost parallel to that of the 45th Division, through the Hochwald and across the border just west of Wissembourg.

Early in the evening of 7 December, the day after the Germans had retaken the northern half of Mertzwiller, the 103rd Infantry Division effected its relief of 45th and 79th Division troops. The 410th and 411th Infantry moved into the southern half of Mertzwiller along the southwestern bank of the Zintzel and manned a roadblock at Neubourg. Patrols felt out enemy defenses, and preparations were made for an attack.

Heavy rains had swollen the Zintzel River, in some places to a width of 400 yards, and all the bridges were out. However, at 0530 hours on 10 December the division attack jumped off. Troops of the 410th Infantry crossed over improvised footbridges, swept into the northern half of Mertzwiller, and assaulted enemy strong points in the houses. Enemy artillery and mortar fire from the northern outskirts fell heavily on the crossing, and a direct hit on a vehicle bridge delayed the attack of tanks and antitank guns for several hours. But by the end of the day the bridge had been repaired, and the 410th Regiment had cleared the town, rescuing 18 men of the 180th Infantry who had been



**AMERICAN TANK DOZER AND BULLDOZER WHICH HAS BEEN
KNOCKED OUT BY NEW GERMAN PLASTIC MINE**

*"... Plastic mines, demolitions, and roadblocks . . . along the way slowed the drive,
but failed to stop the advance . . ."*

cut off in Mertzwiller and who had been in hiding there for several days. Northwest of Mertzwiller the 2nd Battalion of the 411th Infantry had met little opposition in its crossing of the Zintzel River.

After his defense of Mertzwiller the enemy fought no strong delaying actions against the 103rd Division until he had backed up to the German border. Plastic mines, demolitions, roadblocks defended by small groups, and rearguards in several towns along the way slowed the drive but failed to stop the advance. When it was discovered that the Germans were not going to defend the Haguenau Forest, the 103rd with two regiments abreast drove north across the plain, through the unmanned pillboxes of the Maginot Line in the Hochwald, down the long slope of less densely wooded ground toward Wissembourg. As the division approached the border, however, it met strong rearguards. On



103RD DIVISION INFANTRY MOVING THROUGH ENTANGLEMENTS
IN THE MAGINOT FORTRESS NEAR CLIMBACH DURING THEIR
DRIVE TO THE GERMAN FRONTIER

" . . . As the division approached the border, however, it met strong rearguards. On 14 December one of the stiffest battles of the entire month was fought at Climbach . . ."

14 December one of the stiffest battles of the entire month was fought at Climbach.

Lieutenant Colonel John P. Blackshear, Executive Officer of the 411th Infantry, planned the attack on Climbach, which lay to the left in the division zone southwest of Wissembourg. The purpose of the attack on Climbach was to cut German supply lines which "passed west through it to reinforce Lembach, the objective of the 45th Division coming up from the south." Task Force Blackshear moved up the road on the morning of 14 December in a long motorized column. As the point tank destroyer crossed the crest of the hill and headed down into the valley that cradles Climbach, it was hit by a barrage of artillery and knocked out. The barrage continued bitterly all day long. Negro tank destroyer crews moved their four guns out over the crest into the field of artillery fire, set them up, and in four minutes time were firing into the village. Three of the guns were knocked out; but they fired and had drawn enemy fire effectively enough to enable riflemen and machine gunners to secure the two hills which flank Climbach. The artillery battalion was finally able to fire from behind the crest, and behind its barrage riflemen moved into the town and took it after a stiff fight. At 1800 that evening the Germans counterattacked with 200 infantrymen and four tanks. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 410th Infantry were dispatched to go to the aid of Task Force Blackshear and helped break the counterattack.

The 45th and the 103rd Divisions crossed the German border on the same day, 16 December. The 103rd Division advanced in two regimental columns up to the Siegfried Line. On the right flank the 409th Infantry took Rott against the delaying resistance of tanks and infantry of the 21st Panzer Division. It by-passed Wissembourg on 16 December and reached into Germany north of that city. On the next day, reinforced by the 1st Battalion of the 410th Infantry, it attacked to the north with two battalions abreast and ran into heavy fire from the Siegfried Line. On the left flank the 411th Regiment overcame isolated but determined groups of resistance north of Climbach and, followed by a supply train of mules, reached on 17 December the outer defenses of the Siegfried Line near Bobenthal. The 410th Infantry stayed behind, training with Maginot Line pillboxes as dummies for an attack on the Siegfried Line.

In the meantime VI Corps had ordered the 14th Armored Division into action on the corps front. On 12 December the armor was ordered into position between the 103rd and 79th Divisions to attack north the next morning toward the border in the zone between Wissembourg and Scheibenhardt. The 45th and 103rd Divisions on the corps left flank were out far ahead of the 79th Division, which had reached Seltz and could continue the speed of its drive only if the extent of its front were narrowed and its flanks made secure. The 14th Armored Division was, therefore, sent into the line and ordered to clear the open stretches of the upper Alsace Plain. With relatively little difficulty, it moved up to the German border in two columns.

On the left flank Combat Command A drove up to take Soultz-sous-Forets on 13 December, and the next day it reached Riedseltz where it was held up by a strong fire fight. The next day it cleared Riedseltz but was stopped some 500 yards north of the town by intense and accurate time and percussion fire, and it was counterattacked by six Mark IV tanks. Combat Command A repulsed the counterattack, knocking out two of the Mark IV's. On 16 December, when the enemy had withdrawn to the Siegfried Line, it occupied Wissembourg, crossed the river, and sent a small force to the east to take Schweighofen. The main column advanced a short distance north against only token resistance. Armor was now ready to begin its assault on the fortifications of the Siegfried Line.

On the right flank Combat Command B had advanced by 14 December to Salmbach, which it took together with Schleithal on the following day. But beyond this point it could make little progress against enemy infantry, strongly supported by antitank, mortar, and artillery fire from the northern bank of the Lauter River. On 16 December automatic weapons fire from entrenchments in the Bien Wald forced three groups of infantrymen, who had crossed the river, back to the southern bank. While the other elements of VI Corps were ready to assault the Siegfried Line, Combat Command B was able only to patrol with great difficulty into the outer defenses in the southern edges of the Bien Wald. VI Corps in the first half of December had brought four divisions up to the Siegfried Line.

The XV Corps Drive to Bitche

On the left flank of the Seventh Army XV Corps with two infantry divisions had driven northeast through the Vosges and, by 10 December, had outdistanced the drive of VI Corps on the plain. But it was soon brought to a halt. On 10 December the 45th Division was crossing the Zintzel River between Niederbronn and Mertzwiller, the 103rd Division was fighting in Mertzwiller, and troops of the 79th Division were launching their attack against Haguenau for the second day. The 100th and 44th Divisions of XV Corps had reached and occupied Lemberg and Enchenberg less than four miles southwest of Bitche. Within three days, however, VI Corps units had advanced as much as 16 miles, while the Germans had already begun their determined stand against XV Corps in the Ensemble de Bitche fortifications of the Maginot Line.

The XV Corps drive northeast from the Saverne-Sarrebourg axis was a double one: the 44th Division went up through the western slopes of the mountains toward Siersthal, while the 100th Division in a parallel drive between the 44th Division and the crest of the Vosges pointed its attack toward Bitche. The corps left flank was protected by the 106th Cavalry Group and for part of the time by the 12th Armored Division.

During the last five days of November the 44th Division had continued its advance north, after it had repulsed the enemy counterattacks near Rauwiller. It had pushed through rough hill country to take Waldhambach on 2 December and to hold it against four counterattacks. Its mission at that time was to protect the army left flank and to widen the Sarrebourg-Strasbourg corridor. When the Seventh Army shifted its direction of attack to the north, it was intended that the main effort be made "initially on the left" to assist "the Third Army in breaching the Siegfried Line." XV Corps ordered the 44th Division to drive north toward Siersthal and Petit Rederching, to continue without delay to breach and secure the Maginot Line, and then to move on to develop the Siegfried Line.

As the division moved north early in December, it met little resistance. After their failure to retake Waldhambach, the Germans

withdrew rapidly; bridges were blown and the roads were mined and blocked. The 324th Infantry advanced on the left, the 114th on the right. On 3 December the 324th Regiment reached Ratzwiller, where the enemy was prepared to fight a delaying action. The 1st Battalion on the left and the 3rd Battalion on the right moved in on the town from the west to the edge of the surrounding woods. Here a counterattack forced the 1st Battalion back. It was not until two days later that the 324th Infantry was able to attack Ratzwiller from two sides and seize the town. During the next two days mines, especially plastic and the recently developed Topf mines, held up the regimental advance northeast toward Montbronn. When it arrived there on 7 December it found the town already taken by the 114th Regiment.

Here the two columns split again. The 324th Infantry headed for Petit Rederching, the 114th for Enchenberg. It was now time for XV Corps to employ its armor. The 12th Armored Division on 8 December completed relief of the Third Army's 4th Armored Division, which had suffered heavy losses, and drove swiftly down the Sarre Valley along the boundary between XII Corps and XV Corps. On 9 December it took Singling and Bining and continued the advance to the northeast on the following two days. As the 324th Infantry came out of the woods from Guisberg towards Petit Rederching, it was met by heavy enemy resistance. The 12th Armored had driven in from the west. Against intense artillery fire and a strong line of defense along the railroad tracks in Maierhof, the crossroads below Petit Rederching, the 324th Regiment advanced slowly. After three days of bitter fighting Maierhof fell on 10 December. On the next day the regiment fought its way into Petit Rederching and cleared the town.

Meanwhile, the 114th Infantry had been held up at Enchenberg. After the approach from Montbronn on 7 December troops edged into the town to make a reconnaissance in force. They were pinned down by fire from the houses at the edge of the town and from the railroad tracks that run southeast to Lemberg. While the 1st Battalion tried to bring its guns up to fire on German tanks in the center of town, the 2nd Battalion tried to flank the town through the woods on the left. Both attempts failed. On the morning of 9 December, however, troops of the

1st Battalion fought their way to the center of the town. Mines and 88mm fire prevented armor from getting into town and put the whole burden upon the infantry; but by afternoon tanks cleared their way across the railroad tracks and the battalion drove the enemy, still resisting strongly, out of Enchenberg. During the night the Germans withdrew to the north; and on 11 December the 71st Infantry, which had come up to relieve the 114th, reached as far north as Sierathal, the division objective. The next day the advance of the 71st Regiment was stopped by blown bridges over a small stream and by artillery fire from Fort Simserhof in the Ensemble de Bitche. The 44th Division had come up to that part of the Maginot Line which the Germans chose to defend.

On the XV Corps right flank, meanwhile, the 100th Division had been making similar progress. On 2 December Corps Field Order No. 14 had directed the division to capture Bitche and to break through



WESTERN SECTOR OF BITCHE, THE KEY GERMAN STRONGHOLD

" . . . On 2 December Corps Field Order No. 14 had directed the Division to capture Bitche and to break through the Maginot Line . . ."

the Maginot Line. On the next day the 398th Infantry, moving through elements of the 44th Division, came up to the line at the Moder River towns of Puberg and Wingen. The 397th Regiment, temporarily attached to the 45th Division, was moving westward to Wimmenau.

The 2nd Battalion of the 398th Infantry took Puberg against only token resistance, but the 1st Battalion ran into a three-day battle at Wingen. As it approached the town it met a heavy artillery barrage and was pinned down. C Company entered the outskirts but was driven back, while A Company having penetrated the town was cut off and, according to later prisoner of war reports, captured. In the renewed attack on 4 December patrols failed to contact A Company; but C Company outflanked Wingen on the northeast, as other elements of the regiment cut the enemy line of withdrawal to the northwest. When the battalion attacked on 5 December, after its supporting artillery had prepared the way, it found that the enemy had withdrawn, leaving behind only a small rearguard. The Germans were to make their next serious stand at Lemberg near the sources of the Zintzel River.

The 100th Division followed the German force up the two main roads that connect the east-west valleys through the Low Vosges. On the right flank the 397th Infantry, having reverted to control of the 100th Division, took Wimmenau on 5 December. By the evening of 6 December it had moved up to and surrounded Mouterhouse, which it captured on the next day. Meanwhile, the 399th Infantry, which passed through the 398th after the fall of Wingen, advanced to Lemberg. The 398th Regiment on 6 December took Meisenthal, protecting the division left flank. Resistance increased as the 3rd Battalion, spearheading the 399th's attack, approached Lemberg. But by nightfall on 6 December the battalion had surrounded the town. For two days it fought for the hills which command Lemberg from the north and northeast; on 8 December it secured this high ground. The 1st Battalion had come up to launch a fresh attack which carried into the town, and the 2nd Battalion moved around the 3rd to cut the Lemberg-Bitche road. It took still another day to clear the town against heavy fire and strong opposition. The few Germans who escaped withdrew to the northeast to join the rearguard which was pulling out of Enchenberg at the same time.

When the division forces had regrouped at Lemberg and Mouterhouse, they continued to move north. On 12 December the 397th Infantry advanced to the high ground southeast of Bitche. The 398th Regiment moved up to positions southwest of Bitche, while the 399th Infantry remained in division reserve and conducted training in the attack on fortified positions. The divisional plan now called for the 398th Infantry to move quickly to the northwest "to breach the Maginot Line at once", if it were only partially defended as it had been in other sectors. If heavy resistance was encountered the regiment was to stop and prepare for a major attack. On 14 December the 1st Battalion of the 398th attacked out of the woods to the west of Bitche and was pinned down by overwhelming fire from the Maginot forts. It was now necessary to prepare for a major assault.

Assault on Maginot Defenses at Bitche

The Ensemble de Bitche stretches westward along and mostly to the north of the valley road which runs from Camp de Bitche through the town of Bitche to Holbach and Petit Rederching. Four large forts with interconnecting and mutually supporting blocks guard the line between Bitche and Holbach, which the 44th and the 100th Divisions sought to breach. Fort Grand Hohekirkel with eight blocks protects Bitche from the hill to the northeast. Strongest of all the fortifications, Fort Schiesseck with 11 blocks and the support of Fort Fraudenberg guards Bitche and much of the surrounding country from the commanding hill to the northwest. On the large hill east of Holbach, just north of a small tributary of the Schwalb River, stands Fort Simserhof with ten blocks, holding the commanding ground between Holbach and Hottviller. Small forts of from one to five blocks cover the gaps between the large ones.

All along the western front the Germans had made little use of the Maginot forts, most of which were constructed primarily to fire to the east and to the north. But the forts in the Bitche sector were especially strong, and they could fire effectively against an attack from the south. They had surrendered to the Germans in 1940 only after the



armistice. While the Germans in the VI Corps zone on the Plains of Alsace withdrew by bounds to their own Siegfried Line, those in the XV Corps zone were directed to stand in the Ensemble de Bitche. Prisoners were later to report that the commander of the four large forts, Lieutenant Colonel Zuthe, and the officers under him were all under oath to hold them to the last man. It had been expected as early as 13 December, that the German line would hold at the Bitche positions, from which they might launch a counteroffensive. Elements of the 25th Panzer Division opposed the American assault of Simserhof, while elements of the German 361st Infantry Division were in line to defend Schiesseck and the two eastern forts, Otterbiel and Grand Hohekirkel.

XV Corps had to reduce these positions before it continued its advance. By-passing them might result in tremendous casualties inflicted from the flanks and from the rear. The capture of Fort Schiesseck and Fort Simserhof, the strongest two because of their commanding positions, would insure the reduction of the whole string. On 13 December the 44th Division engaged Fort Simserhof. The 100th Division began its attack on Fort Schiesseck on 14 December.

On 12 December the 324th Infantry of the 44th Division, having advanced from Petit Rederching, had been stopped on the western banks of the Schwalb River below Hottviller. During the next two days it managed to send one battalion across the river to hold its east bank and to move north on both sides of the river to outflank Hottviller from the northwest. Here it remained for several days, defending and patrolling; but there was to be no attack from this quarter until Fort Simserhof had been reduced and the rest of the division had caught up.

Eight of the pillboxes of Fort Simserhof stand on top of the hill which rises northeast of Holbach in the fork made by the Schwalb River and one of its tributaries. A thousand yards to the south of these pillboxes are the personnel and ammunition entrances to the fort. It is from here that the elaborate underground communication, lighting, and ventilation systems of the fort are controlled. The 71st Infantry, as it prepared to attack from its positions between Siersthal and Holbach, secured whatever information on the construction of the fortifications

it could find. The regiment planned to outflank the fort on the east, pound it with artillery, bomb it from the air, destroy the personnel and ammunition entrances in the rear, and then assault in force.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions advanced against heavy opposition to the northeast. Thrown back from Freudenberg farm by a counter-attack on 13 December, they retook lost ground on the next day, captured the pillboxes which cover the gap between Fort Simserhof and Fort Schiesseck, and pushed up to outflank the eight pillboxes of Simserhof from the east. Here for four days they fought off counterattacks, reconnoitered the pillboxes, and waited for the major attack.



VALLEY LOOKING TOWARDS FORT SIMSERHOF

"... they pushed up to outflank the eight pillboxes of Simserhof from the east ..."

On 17 December the XII Tactical Air Force flew three close-support missions over the fort; and on the following day division artillery, the 156th and 242nd Field Artillery Battalions, pounded it. Prisoners were later to report that these attacks were effective. Three pillboxes

were so badly disabled that they had to be abandoned; several guns were knocked out; one 240mm direct hit drove in the top of a concrete pill-box which was two meters thick. The morale effect was devastating. When the lighting and ventilating systems broke down, as much the result of the assault on the personnel entrance as the effect of the shelling, suffocating and blinding gases from the heavy guns in the fort made further resistance impossible.

The 2nd Battalion of the 71st Infantry and Company C of the 63rd Engineer Battalion had from 14 to 18 December worked on the personnel and ammunition entrances on the southern hill. The am-



AMERICAN SOLDIER EXAMINES INTERIOR OF GERMAN FORT
IN THE MAGINOT LINE

*... By evening of 17 December they had entered the fort and explored its recesses down
23 flights of stairways . . ."*

munition entrance was smoked and sealed off. On 14 and 15 December, while riflemen, tank destroyers, and tanks covered them from the fire of both blocks, the engineers cut a path through the two barbed wire

entanglements which ringed the personnel entrance, blew holes in the turrets with satchel charges, and dropped a bangalore torpedo down one of the holes to destroy the diesel power plant. On the next two days tank destroyers opened larger holes, through which riflemen dropped phosphorous grenades and the engineers dropped charges of TNT. By evening of 17 December they had entered the fort and explored its recesses down 23 flights of stairways, going down to the small-gauge railway at the bottom. On the following day, when the Germans resisted their push through the railway tunnel, they decided to blow the staircase and the ventilation system. This they did by exploding 600 pounds of TNT on the stairway and by covering the block with dirt pushed up by a tank-dozer.

On the morning of 19 December the division jumped off for its general assault on the northern pillboxes of Fort Simserhof. The 114th Infantry, which had relieved the 324th in the northwest, attacked Hottviller, while the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 71st regiment attacked the eight pillboxes on the northern hill. Neither force met any opposition. At 0400 hours that morning the enemy had withdrawn from the fort and had retreated north of Hottviller. Having seized its objective, the 44th Division held its positions and prepared for an attack north to the Siegfried Line. The 100th Division was still fighting at Fort Schiesseck.

Supported by the fire of Forts Simserhof, Otterbiel, and Grand Hohekirkel, Fort Schiesseck stands astride the large barren hill which commands Bitche from the northwest. Nine of its 11 blocks are on top of the hill; the others surround its base with fields of fire in all directions. One of these to the southwest is called Freudenberg. The pillboxes of Schiesseck were made of stout steel-reinforced concrete, extended three or four stories underground, and were interconnected; each was surrounded by a moat; each was equipped with tubes down which grenades could be rolled against attacking troops. Three of the blocks had disappearing turrets, and all were heavily armed. Artillery from Otterbiel and Grand Hohekirkel could be expected to cover any attack on Schiesseck. The town of Bitche and Camp de Bitche, to the east, could be taken only after Schiesseck had fallen.

When the 1st Battalion of the 398th Infantry had been pinned down in its experimental attack on 14 December the 100th Division completed plans for a major assault. The plan called for the 398th Regiment on the left to make the main effort, while the 397th on the right was to hold its ground and later to capture Otterbiel and Grand Hohekirkel. The 3rd Battalion was to spearhead the attack of the 398th Infantry against Fort Schiesseck. L Company on the left was to take Freudenberg and blocks 9, 1, 7, 2, and 3; I Company on the right was to take blocks 10, 11, 8, 5, 6, and 4. One platoon was to assault each pillbox. While two squads covered with fire, the third was to advance to button up the apertures. Attached engineers were then to use demolitions, after which tank-dozers were to cover openings and seal off the pillbox. Chemical mortars, 81mm mortars, and tanks were to give maximum support to the attack.

For two days, 15 and 16 December, supporting artillery and the XII Tactical Air Force softened the target. Twenty-seven tons of bombs were dropped on the forts with 32 direct hits. The artillery fired 481 rounds and reported 117 direct hits. All this power, however, had little effect. Although one turret was destroyed, forward observers saw 240mm shells ricochet off the four foot-thick wall of the casements. Even on the second day, when some of the guns moved up to the crest of the protecting hill and fired point blank, the effect was not decisive. The Germans withdrew underground, but they were prepared to come up again when the artillery fire lifted.

The attack began on 17 December. The 397th Infantry had already reached the high ground east of Hottviller to guard the division left flank, alongside the 44th Division forces already there. On the morning of 17 December it launched a diversionary attack on Camp de Bitche. Protected to this extent on their left and right, the two assaulting companies watched an hour-and-a-half air and artillery bombardment, then moved out under a light rolling barrage which lifted as they came up to their targets.

The L Company assault platoon, on the left, found Fort Freudenberg deserted. It was left for a support platoon to secure; and

the troops moved on to assault block 9, which was taken as planned. The I Company assault platoon took blocks 10 and 11. Number 11 was the personnel entrance, large and strongly defended. Three riflemen rushed the block and dropped grenades into its turret to silence a machine gun. The first squad attempted to rush to the moat, but mortar fire from higher on the hill killed three of them and drove the others back. An engineer crawled across, set a satchel charge against the door, released the detonator, and withdrew with the riflemen who had supported him. When the charge failed to explode, a bazooka team attempted to move up to fire on it; but both its members were killed as they advanced. Another bazooka team came up from one of the squads in the rear, fired in the charge, and exploded it. When the smoke cleared, the point squad again rushed the fort. When engineers came up to blow a fixed inner door and the staircase and when the tank-dozer had covered the fort with dirt, the job was done. Throughout the battle for Fort Schiesseck mortar and artillery fire from the blocks on top of the hill, from the neighboring forts, and from the town of Bitche, did more than frontal fire from the assaulted blocks to harass the attackers.

After taking the first four blocks Companies I and L dug in. During the afternoon the XII Tactical Air Force bombed Fort Otterbiel, which had caused heavy casualties with its artillery; and during the night 100th Division artillery fired on the remaining blocks to clear paths through dense barbed wire. On 18 December the attack was renewed, until only block 2 remained to be taken. The assault troops withdrew from block 3 so that artillery might fire on block 2. The bitter fight for this last position took two days. It fell on the morning of 20 December.

The 100th Division had now reduced Fort Schiesseck, and it planned to clear the town of Bitche and advance to the north to come up to the 44th Division line. Both forces were then to move toward the Siegfried Line. Only after a week of heavy fighting and with a full concentration of power had XV Corps been able to knock out the strongest of the Maginot fortifications, when the Germans chose to defend at the Ensemble de Bitche.

Attacking the Siegfried Line

While XV Corps was breaching the Maginot Line, VI Corps fought up to and into the Siegfried Line in its zone. Before the VI Corps advance the enemy had withdrawn warily, using his self-propelled and tank guns rather than his artillery "in an apparent effort to keep artillery positions in the Siegfried Line secret as long as possible." Orders were issued by the German Command on 16 December to the delaying troops to retreat to the fortifications along the German border.

As early as 7 December Seventh Army G-2 had spotted the zones of the Siegfried Line where the most intensive preparations for defense were being made. In the Bien Wald little activity was seen, and it appeared likely that here the system for defense relied largely on terrain. In the open country between Steinfeld and Ober-Otterbach men were engaged in laying wire and mines, digging antitank ditches in some places as many as three in depth, and preparing communication trenches between bunkers. Some ten miles behind these primary defenses ran a secondary antitank ditch. In the wooded mountains between Ober-Otterbach and Eppenbrunn the Germans appeared again, as in the Bien Wald, to be depending largely on the terrain. In the western open stretch, which the XV Corps might hit, the preparation appeared as intense as that between Steinfeld and Ober-Otterbach. The line was, of course, studded with pillboxes and bunkers.

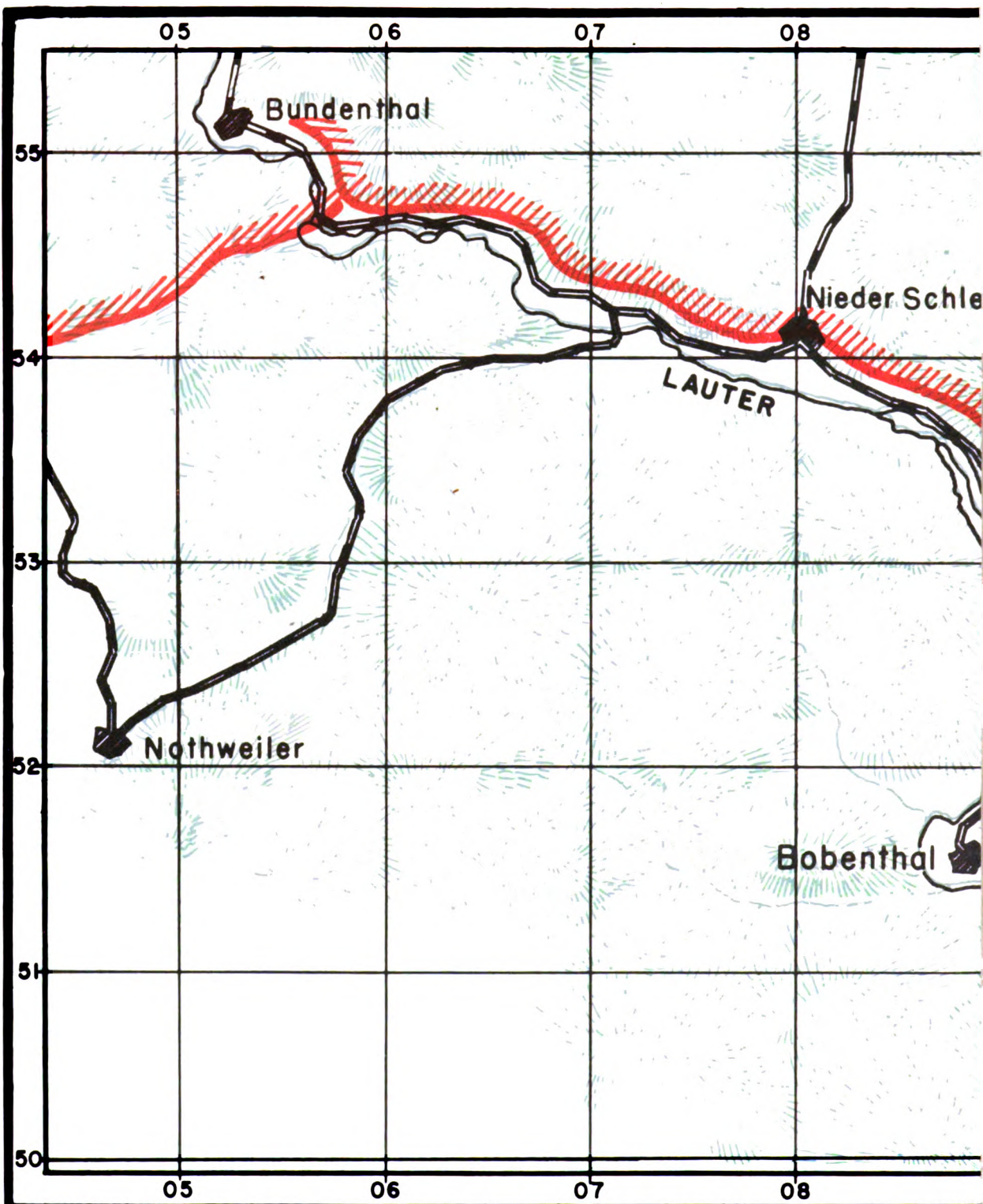
By 16 December the enemy had disposed his troops in the Siegfried Line fortifications to oppose the VI Corps advance. In the Bien Wald next to the Rhine and in front of the 79th Division was the German 256th Infantry Division. Guarding the western edges of the forest and holding the forts in the open country between Steinfeld and Ober-Otterbach against the drive of the 14th Armored Division were elements of the 21st Panzer Division. Farther west the German 245th Infantry Division opposed the drive of the 45th and 103rd Divisions near Bobenthal and Bundenthal. Against these forces entrenched in the Siegfried Line the VI Corps probed and prodded and attacked for five days, for the most part ineffectively and, as it turned out, in vain.

On 17 December the two columns of the 79th Division, moving north from Scheibenhardt and Lauterbourg, had run into the outer

defenses of the Siegfried Line and were stopped by minefields, wire entanglements, pillboxes, and a 12 to 25 foot-wide antitank ditch, which hemmed the main defenses. On 18 December their separate attacks failed. The 314th Infantry, on the left flank below Buchelberg, edged forward and knocked out one pillbox, but its attempts to cut wires and to maneuver its armor were unsuccessful. The 313th Infantry, on the right flank above Berg, managed to get ladders and trees across the antitank ditch; but the troops which scrambled across were quickly pinned down. Just before dark a tank-dozer pushed enough dirt into the ditch to make it passable for tanks.

Division ordered a coordinated attack for the next day; each column would attack, two battalions abreast. The 314th Regiment made practically no headway; its 1st Battalion was shortly pinned down, and its 2nd Battalion was stopped by a strong roadblock after a short advance. While the 3rd Battalion of the 313th Regiment was held up, the 2nd Battalion got a platoon of tanks and two companies of riflemen across the antitank ditch. They moved through wire obstacles, across trenches, and at the cost of two tanks knocked out three pillboxes. Here they repulsed two strong counterattacks. This advance, in the Bien Wald above Berg, marked the farthest penetration of the 79th Division into the Siegfried Line. In the evening of 19 December the division ordered both the 313th and 314th Regiments to remain in place, to dig in, and to maintain contact with the enemy by patrols and demonstrations.

Meanwhile the eastern column of the 14th Armored Division, Combat Command B, above Schleithal and on the left flank of the 315th Infantry, never succeeded in getting more than patrols across the Lauter River into the Bien Wald. Nor did the western column, Combat Command A, actually penetrate the Siegfried Line in the strongly defended open stretch between the Bien Wald and the Hardt Mountains. But it did develop strong outpost lines of antitank ditches, dragon's teeth, roadblocks, and occasional pillboxes; and it absorbed the shock of the enemy's fiercest counterblows. Given no cover, exposed to the sudden thrusts of the armor of the 21st Panzer Division, it withdrew on 17 December from its two advance positions on the roads to Ober-Otterbach and to Steinfeld. The XII Tactical Air Force then flew two medium



ATTACKS ON BOBENTI

Miles 0 1/2 1

bomber missions of 120 sorties against the fortifications between Ober-Otterbach and Steinfeld. The air attack had only limited success; and when, on 18 December Combat Command A tried once more to advance, it met the same furious opposition. It made some headway towards Ober-Otterbach but was driven back by a counterattack. On the next day all forces adjusted their positions but made no attempt to advance.

On the left flank of the 14th Armored Division the 103rd Infantry Division was advancing, in the meantime, on the VI Corps front. Driving north from the border in two regimental columns, the 409th on the right toward Dorrenbach, the 411th on the left toward Reisdorf, the 103rd Division had made its way to the Siegfried Line. The division had a number of initial successes. It captured pillboxes and bunkers and repulsed several strong counterattacks, but it made no decisive penetration. The 409th Infantry took the hill west of Dorrenbach and, as it continued the advance, ran into three mutually supporting pillboxes. On 19 December it reduced two of them with rifle grenades and satchel charges; on the next day it beat off a tank-supported counterattack and dug in at strong positions. But the 409th Regiment was to go no farther.

The 3rd Battalion of the 411th Infantry tried vainly for five days to get at an undetermined number of pillboxes to the west of Reisdorf. Its efforts to employ tanks against Siegfried Line positions were unrewarding: the 76mm guns had no noticeable effect on the pillboxes. Fire from the pillboxes drove back infantrymen who came within 100 yards of them. The 2nd Battalion of the 411th Infantry, going up the western side of the road from Bobenthal, reached the high ground southwest of Reisdorf and took a large bunker and several pillboxes, holding them against counterattacks. The 1st Battalion, advancing on the eastern side of the road, was topped before a large and intensely defended bunker on high ground southeast of Reisdorf. For three days, from 18 to 20 December, it attempted to take the fort; but each attack was thrown back bitterly. On the night of 20 December neither the 409th nor the 411th Regiment of the 103rd Division was able to move forward.

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penetration of that line to be achieved by the Seventh Army in December. West of Wissembourg the Lauter River bends to the northwest through Bobenthal, Nieder-Schlettenbach, and Bundenthal. It was along this line, in the zone of these three towns, that the 45th Division attacked the Siegfried Line. Having cleared Nothweiler and Bobenthal on 16 December, the 157th Infantry on the division left flank advanced north and prepared to cross the Lauter and attack Bundenthal. On the division right flank the 180th Infantry sent its 1st Battalion up to attack Nieder-Schlettenbach, and its 3rd Battalion prepared to develop the hill that flanks Nieder-Schlettenbach on the east.



KEY HILL SOUTHEAST OF NIEDER-SCHLETTENBACH

" . . . the 3rd Battalion prepared to develop the hill that flanks Nieder-Schlettenbach on the east . . . "

The 157th Regiment did not take Bundenthal. Early in the morning of 18 December it sent its 1st and 2nd Battalions across the river in an attempt to outflank the town. Pillboxes on high ground north of the Lauter River and intense fire from Bundenthal made the venture

difficult and costly. The 2nd Battalion's assault boats were driven back, and the troops had to wade across through waist-deep icy water. Two platoons from each battalion reached the shelter of the antitank ditch which encircled the town and then entered the town itself. But the rest were thrown back to the shelter of the woods on the south side of the river and were unable to make another crossing in force. For five days patrols tried vainly to reach the four platoons which had been cut off in Bundenthal. On 23 December two members of the lost group escaped back to their own lines to say that 74 of the men were still alive in the town. Under the protection of a heavy artillery barrage, these two men led a strong patrol into the town and succeeded in getting them all, including the wounded back to safety.

The 1st Battalion of the 180th Infantry had cleared Nieder-Schlettenbach on 18 December and held it against a bitter counterattack by two companies of infantry. On the following day it began to attack the pillboxes along the northern side of the road down to Bobenthal. More important to the regimental advance than the town of Nieder-Schlettenbach was Hill 327 (height in meters) east of the town. This was the target of the 3rd Battalion of the 180th Infantry. The fortifications on the southern face of the hill were strong. When the 3rd Battalion was stopped on 16 December by a roadblock north of Bobenthal and at the foot of the hill, it prepared to send one company northeast to pierce the string of pillboxes which protect the left flank of the hill position, then to cut back west to take the southern fortifications of the hill from the rear.

Early in the morning of 17 December K Company, having discovered the locations of the eastern flank pillboxes by patrol, attacked with its third platoon. Coordinated artillery fire had driven Volks-Grenadier troops of the enemy 245th Division out of their trenches and into the pillbox which was the target. The platoon leader climbed to the roof of the pillbox, lifted the concrete ventilator cap, and dropped in a phosphorous grenade. Fifteen minutes later four Germans came out with their hands up and their gas masks on. Before nightfall the next pillbox to the west was taken, and troops had dug in on the hillside facing Hill 327. On the next day L Company and the rest of K Company came

through the gap that had been broken and secured and swung to the west to reach Hill 327. From their positions here they beat off several counterattacks, captured from the rear the pillboxes around the southern base of the hill, which had held up the battalion advance, and prepared to move down toward Nieder-Schlettenbach there to join the 1st Battalion.

While most of VI Corps was doggedly attempting to push into the Siegfried Line by frontal attacks, these troops of the 180th Infantry had found that pillboxes approached from the rear were "just traps". It had taken them five days to complete this maneuver. Had the attack of the 45th Division been continued, troops might have been able from this wedge above Bobenthal to push north into the Saar. But on 21 December the division received orders to withdraw its forward elements and to dig in defensive positions.

The Army Shifts to the Defensive

On the night of 20-21 December Seventh Army seemed to be bracing itself for a thrust into the Saar-Palatinate. XV Corps was now free to move north above the Ensemble de Bitch. VI Corps was ready to continue its prodding of the Siegfried Line and perhaps to exploit the 45th Division salient on its left flank. The Seventh Army drive north into Germany was called off before its culmination. Acting upon orders of Higher Headquarters Seventh Army directed all its divisions to discontinue the attack and to prepare a new line of defense. The 100th Division withdrew to the positions from which it had jumped off on its assault against Fort Schiesseck. The 180th Infantry of the 45th Division withdrew south of the Lauter River. The other divisions dug in where they were. General von Rundstedt's counter-offensive in Belgium and Luxembourg was to make the last ten days of December an anticlimax for Seventh Army. During those ten days there was little activity other than the shifting of positions along the army front, for both American and enemy forces were readjusting their lines.

The German counter-offensive, which had jumped off with 17 divisions on 16 December had in five days driven 35 miles on a 60

mile front. On 19 December Third Army's XII Corps had taken over the III Corps front so that III Corps could move north to attack the southern flank of Von Rundstedt's Ardennes salient. To relieve Third Army for the maximum effort against the German threat Seventh Army extended its left boundary to St. Avold and prepared defenses on a front which stretched 84 miles westward from the Rhine. The shift took four days and was completed by 26 December.

In accomplishing its part of the shift to the west between 20 and 26 December XV Corps was able to make the adjustment more readily since the 87th Infantry Division of XII Corps, in accordance with oral agreement between the Commanding Generals of the Third and Seventh Armies, was to be attached to XV Corps on 21 December and remain until all reliefs had been effected. The 35th and 80th Divisions of XII Corps made immediate preparations for movement north. After full readjustment had been completed, the 87th Infantry Division was moved to assembly at Dieuze and from there to Rheims, passing from control of XV Corps and Seventh Army at 0001 hours on 28 December.

During this period of the extension of the Seventh Army line, brought about by the Ardennes counter-offensive, elements of the 63rd, 42nd, and 70th Divisions, which had debarked at Marseille and which consisted of the infantry regiments and a provisional staff headed by the assistant commander of each division, were arriving in the army area. None of these units had completed its full training program in the United States, but it was the intention of higher headquarters that they train intensively under Seventh Army supervision until such time as they could be employed in their combat roles. In conjunction with this training, they could become indoctrinated by employment on line of communications duties or in an inactive role such as flank protection along the Rhine.

The small provisional headquarters of each of these divisional groups was somewhat reinforced by signal and other service personnel to enable each to operate on a limited scale. Each group was designated a task force, named after the assistant divisional commander concerned. Elements of the 42nd Infantry Division became Task Force Linden;

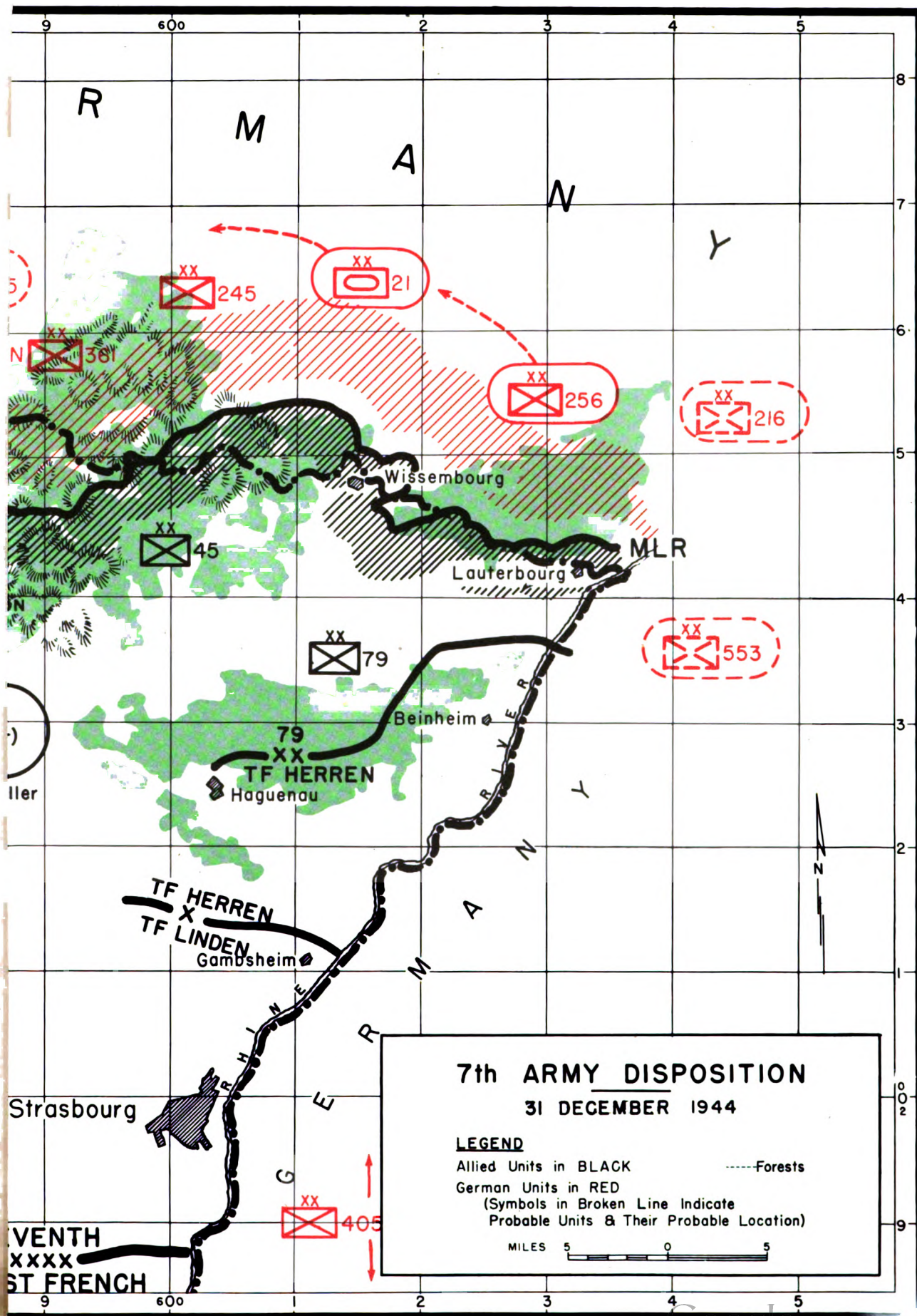
elements of the 63rd Infantry Division became Task Force Harris; and elements of the 70th Infantry Division became Task Force Herren.

At the end of December Seventh Army had reorganized its corps components and held the new front. XV Corps had relieved XII Corps and defended a line from St. Avold to Bitche. It consisted of the 106th Cavalry Group on the left flank, the 103rd Division, which had been transferred from VI Corps, the 44th Division and the 100th Division on the right flank. On 30 December the newly-arrived Task Force Harris was withdrawn from its initial positions along the Rhine and transferred, less one regiment, to XV Corps. Two regiments, the 253rd and 255th Infantry, were attached to the 44th and 100th Divisions for additional strength on the line. The 254th Regiment was at the same time attached to the 3rd Division on the rim of the Colmar Pocket.

VI Corps defended the line between Bitche and the Rhine in slightly less advanced positions than those it had achieved in its northern drive. On the corps left flank in the lower Vosges was a task force which consisted of Combat Command R of the 14th Armored Division less one tank battalion, Company B of the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company B of the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, and the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. This force was designated Task Force Hudelson. To the east were the 45th and 79th Divisions. The Rhine flank, extending some 40 miles southward from Lauterbourg, was guarded by Task Force Herren and Task Force Linden, Infantry elements of the 70th and 42nd Infantry Divisions respectively.

Seventh Army readjustment on its extended line was complicated by the necessity of employing new and inexperienced units at the same time that army was required to make additional sacrifices to the exigencies of the situation on the German Ardennes salient. The newly-arrived 63rd, 42nd, and 70th Divisions were required to furnish 219 basics from each regiment, these replacements to be moved north to the Third Army for the counterattack on the Ardennes front. The scarcity of infantry replacements necessitated a program for converting Seventh Army Service troops into infantrymen.

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United States, would be employed to coordinate the activities of Task Force Linden, Herren, and Harris in protecting a sector of the army right flank along the Rhine. On 25 December an advance part of XXI Corps, commanded by Major General Frank W. Milburn, arrived at the Seventh Army Command Post at Saverne; but in view of developments at the end of December the full right flank protection of Seventh Army was left to VI Corps. On 29 December XXI Corps, consisting of the 36th Infantry Division and the 12th Armored Division, was earmarked as SHAEF reserve,

The mission of Seventh Army as outlined on 19 December was to be defensive, but the change in mission was to be concealed as much as possible by some continuation of offensive action. For the last ten days of December patrols were active along the front in an effort to impress the



MAJOR GENERAL
FRANK W. MILBURN
*"... Earmarked as SHAEF
reserve ..."*

fact upon the enemy that, as XV Corps put it, "No Man's Land belongs to the Corps and not to the German forces opposing it" These orders were issued when it was still thought that the Seventh Army December offensive might soon be continued. As December came to a close, it became apparent that the German Ardennes attack was more serious than had been at first supposed. Seventh Army was prompted to make a more intensive preparation for a campaign that was to be purely defensive.

Enemy patrols, especially on the XV Corps front, became more aggressive. Several small patrols on the VI Corps front crossed the Rhine between Beinheim and Gambsheim. Increased German attempts at espionage and sabotage resulted in the establishment of armored roadblocks throughout the Sixth Army Group sector and the checking of trip tickets and dogtags. The reshuffling and refitting and strengthening of the German forces indicated a build-up for a large attack.

Up until about 25 December it was thought that elements of

the 11th Panzer Division, the 21st Panzer Division, and the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, which had been identified on the Seventh Army front at various times during the month might have been withdrawn and sent north to join the Ardennes counter-offensive. It seemed possible that the First German Army, opposing Seventh Army, might be deprived of all its mobile units. But by 29 December it was known that the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division was refitting in the Zweibruecken area; and it was believed that two other mobile units, the 17th and the 21st Panzer Divisions, had not moved north but were also refitting preparatory to action on the Seventh Army front. Rail movements, persistent prisoner of war reports, and photo interpretation indicated a build-up of forces in the Saarbruecken area as well as in the Colmar bridgehead and east of the Rhine Valley. Elements of nine divisions of the First German Army were in contact with Seventh Army: the 245th, 256th, 257th, 361st Volksgrenadier Divisions, the 19th, 36th, and 347th Infantry Divisions; and fragmentary elements of the three mobile units which were reforming in the rear. Their total strength of combat effectives was equal to about 16 to 17 battalions of American infantry. Enemy forces across the Rhine were believed equivalent in strength to eight battalions.

On 24 December Seventh Army received a warning from Sixth Army Group:

Excellent agent sources report enemy units building up in the BLACK FOREST area for offensive. Other indications for imminent enemy aggressive action exist. Imperative that all defensive precautions be immediately effective.

The altered tactical situation had already been presented to the Army Commander by his G-2 with remarkable clarity and accuracy. In the middle of December there appeared in the War Room a G-2 map which depicted graphically the enemy's capabilities. In his "Estimate of the Enemy Situation No. 6", dated 29 December 1944, the Army G-2 reached the following conclusions:

Capabilities —

1. To attack south from Bitch-Sarreguemines area with five to eight divisions with initial objective of seizing Saverne and Ingwiller Passes.

2. To attack southwest from the Volklingen — Forbach — Sarreguemines area with five to eight divisions and the mission of capturing Metz and securing the crossings over the Moselle.
3. With forces currently in contact and in immediate reserve, to launch a series of limited objective attacks.
4. Counterattack from Bienwald Forest and Hardt Mountains to seize general line Woerth — Soultz Sous Forets — Seltz.

Capabilities 3 and 1 were favored in that order. G-2 explained his reasoning as follows:

The most logical and economical employment of forces now in contact and known to be in reserve would be in demonstrations, threats, infiltrations and limited objective attacks designed to contain the Seventh Army in its present positions.

Indications of enemy concentrations and build-ups in the Saarbrücken area and in the East Rhine Valley are disturbing, however, and the Nineteenth Army's determination to hold the Colmar bridgehead may shortly assume added significance. Certainly the recovery of Alsace, in addition to its military value, would provide a tremendous uplift to German morale, particularly if the attack in the Eifel area fails to achieve any substantial success.

Additional confirmation of the Saarbrücken and East Rhine Valley area build-ups will tend to favor Capability 1. Conversely, identification of the 21st Pz and/or other mobile units of the First German Army in the Eifel area will be indicative of less ambitious enemy intentions in Alsace.

The current success of the Third U.S. Army's counter-attack from the South, and the enemy's apparent emphasis on operations to the northwest in the Eifel sector, tends to discount Capability 2.

As this picture of enemy intentions grew clearer, Seventh Army preparations for defense were intensified; and the sense of anticlimax gave way to a sense of immediate danger. Sixth Army Group instructions of 21 December had directed Seventh Army to be "prepared to yield ground rather than endanger the integrity of its forces." During the early part of the last ten days of December VI Corps had begun to prepare an alternate main line of resistance in the Maginot Line. Both VI Corps and XV Corps had been preparing counterattacks against possible enemy penetrations as well as consolidating lines of defense. At the end of the year the 2nd French Armored Division, recently attached to XV Corps, was being brought into the corps area prepared

to counterattack any enemy penetration of the line. In the VI Corps area the 14th Armored Division was strategically located with a similar mission.



LIEUTENANT GENERAL PATCH OFFERING ONE OF HIS MEN A CIGARETTE, DURING HIS VISIT TO XV CORPS COMMAND POST AT FENETRANGE

"... On New Year's Eve General Patch visited the XV Corps Command Post at Fenetrangle and there warned both the XV Corps and the VI Corps Commanding Generals that an enemy attack was to be expected during the early hours of New Year's Day . . ."

During the last two days of the month these preparations were completed. A radio message from Sixth Army Group, received on 30 December, warned the Seventh Army

that a hostile attack against your flank west of Bitche may force you to give ground from your main position. To meet such a possibility, it is necessary that your west flank be protected by a reserve battle position. With this in mind, reconnaissance and organization of a reserve battle position will be instituted without delay along high ground on the general lines: Hill east of Landroff-Bennestroff-

Sarre-Union-Ingwiller. One half of each division and attached troops currently earmarked as SHAEF reserve, located in your area, may be employed at any given period of time to assist in organization of ground, provided troops so employed can be reassembled and prepared for movement on eight hour notice

These directives were carried out by New Year's Eve. XV Corps prepared its secondary main line of resistance with its western anchor in the Maginot Line. The SHAEF-earmarked 36th Division and 12th Armored Division, as well as the 2nd French Armored Division upon its arrival in the XV Corps zone, were ordered to be ready to counterattack against enemy penetrations. Both corps planned to defend on their forward lines until ordered to withdraw and to fight delaying actions back to the secondary line. The 14th Armored Division, in VI Corps reserve near Bouxwiller, was ordered to prepare for counterattack to the right flank of XV Corps, in the Strasbourg area, or to the south toward Selestat.

On the Seventh Army left flank Third Army was "limiting the enemy offensive and . . . preparing to counterattack." On its right flank the French First Army contained the Colmar Pocket and prepared "defensive positions in depth." On New Year's Eve General Patch visited the XV Corps Command Post at Fenetrance and there warned both the XV Corps and the VI Corps Commanding Generals that an enemy attack was to be expected during the early hours of New Year's Day.

CHAPTER XX

American Divisions in the Colmar Stalemate

AT the end of December the Seventh Army was threatened by the possibility of a German counter-offensive not only from the north between Lauterbourg and Saarbruecken but also from the east along the Rhine front north of Strasbourg and from the south where the enemy still held an extensive pocket in and around Colmar. Whether to hold Strasbourg or to relinquish the city to the Germans became an increasingly important question, as this advance Seventh Army position along the Rhine became less tenable for defense. The immediate enemy threat to Strasbourg was eliminated only with the Allied offensive in late January which was to wipe out the Colmar Pocket.

For the first half of December the 3rd Infantry Division as a part of VI Corps held positions in and around Strasbourg and was responsible for its defense. As the VI Corps Rhine flank was extended to the north between 10 and 18 December, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron patrolled and defended positions between the 3rd and 79th Divisions. When it had been decided by mid-December that the 36th Infantry Division, "desperately in need of relief and rehabilitation", was to be withdrawn from its operations in the Colmar Pocket with the First French Army and was to effect the relief of and be relieved by the 3rd Division in Strasbourg, it was further decided at Seventh Army Headquarters to provide for any emergency that might arise in the temporarily weakened Strasbourg defenses by alerting four battalions of combat engineers for immediate movement to that city

should the occasion arise. The exchange of positions by the 3rd and 36th Divisions was completed by 21 December.

At the end of the following day the 36th Division and its attached troops passed from the command of VI Corps and reverted to Seventh Army control. During the last days of December there was an almost constant reshuffling and regrouping of forces in and around Strasbourg and north along the Rhine, Task Forces Harris, Herren, and Linden being most importantly involved. By 31 December Strasbourg was being held by Task Force Linden. The 36th Division had by that time been withdrawn to SHAEF reserve. The Seventh Army watch on



**INFANTRYMEN TAKE COVER INSIDE A GASOLINE STATION ON
THE OUTSKIRTS OF COLMAR. A DEAD GERMAN DEFENDER LIES
IN THE SNOW COVERED STREET**

" . . . Farther south the Colmar front was, during the month of December, far from quiet and caused increasing apprehension . . . "

the Rhine during December had been relatively quiet, although patrol clashes accentuated the growing tension. Farther south the Colmar

front was, during the month of December, far from quiet and caused increasing apprehension.

Not only were Colmar Pocket operations significant for the Seventh Army in so far as that pocket represented a serious threat to the army's rear; but the 36th and 3rd Divisions, although they participated in action on the Colmar front under the operational control of the First French Army, remained a supply and maintenance responsibility of the Commanding General, Seventh Army. These two divisions had been so long a part of the Seventh Army order of battle that their operations, under whatever command, must receive some comment. When they were returned to Seventh Army operational control, they were battle-weary and in need of rehabilitation before being made again the spearhead of an army attack.

The Stalemate

On 5 December 1944 the boundary between the First French Army and the American VI Corps had been moved to the north, and the operations against the Colmar Pocket became the responsibility of the First French Army alone. The pocket had been formed by the combined operations of the French and VI Corps, advancing on their respective fronts. Elements of the French I Corps had entered Mulhouse in the south on 22 November. French troops reached and held positions along the Rhine River north of Basel. The 2nd French Armored Division, then attached to the American XV Corps, entered Strasbourg on 23 November. A VI Corps offensive, which had begun rolling across the Meurthe River and through the Vosges Mountains on 20 November, closed in from the west and north. The 3rd American Infantry Division moved up to occupy Strasbourg, sealing off the north. As the American sector was brought up to the western edge of the Rhine Plain when the 36th and 103rd Infantry Divisions captured Selestat, the 2nd French Armored Division passed to VI Corps control and moved southward in the Rhine Plain.

The Colmar Pocket, the German "bridgehead" west of the Rhine and south of Strasbourg, extended roughly 50 miles along the Rhine between Rhinau and Kembs, and at its widest, where it contained

the High Vosges as far west as the upper Thur Valley, it was 30 miles in breadth. The northern slender stretch of the pocket along the Rhine River was flat and open country but replete with waterways and forest



VALLEY OF THE RHINE SOUTH OF STRASBOURG. VOSGES MOUNTAINS
IN BACKGROUND

" . . . The Colmar Pocket, the German bridgehead west of the Rhine and south of Strasbourg, extended roughly 50 miles along the Rhine between Rhinau and Kembs, and at its widest, where it contained the High Vosges as far west as the upper Thur Valley, it was 30 miles in breadth . . . "

areas. Between Selestat and Mulhouse the pocket bulged westward into the High Vosges Mountains. On 5 December the boundary of the pocket followed the Thur River Valley from Thann northward, passed through the mountains in the vicinity of the Bonhomme Pass, and then cut northeast to enter the Rhine Plain in the Ribeauville-Selestat area. The north line in the plain lay between Ebersheim and Rhinau.

The pocket was divided into French I and II Corps areas. The II Corps, with which the American 36th and later the 3rd Infantry

Divisions served, had the northern sector, which began at St. Amarin in the Thur Valley, curved north and eastward around the bulge of the pocket, and included the sector in the Rhine Plain below Strasbourg. On 5 December, when both the 36th Division and the French 2nd Armored Division were relieved from attachment to VI Corps and attached for operations to the First French Army, the 36th Division occupied a front which lay between the sectors of the French 2nd Armored Division and the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division. The American division linked up with French armor between Selestat and Ebersheim just inside the edge of the Rhine Plain, and in the mountains to the west patrols of its 36th Reconnaissance Troop connected it with the 3rd Algerian Division.

The German Nineteenth Army on the Colmar front had been cut off from the German First Army to the north by the Allied breakthrough in the Strasbourg area. An Allied report made reference to the German's "hopeless tactical situation south of Strasbourg." But enemy resistance was stiff and remained so. Determined opposition was made to the efforts of Allied troops to carry out the orders General de Lattre gave his command on 2 December; to surround and destroy the German forces in Alsace and the Vosges and make them unavailable for use east of the Rhine. The I and II French Corps were given the general objectives of reaching the Rhine at Brisach as soon as possible. A German document captured early in December stated that German troops west of the Rhine were to be considered expendable and were to hold out as long as possible. By 7 December it was noted that the "Nineteenth Army continued its slow withdrawal out of the Vosges, but it offered strong delaying action from the north and west before Selestat, while maintaining strong pressure in the Mulhouse area."

This theme, with variations, characterized the stalemate phase of Colmar Pocket operations, which was succeeded by the elimination phase only with the onset of Allied attacks late in January. During all phases of the Colmar Pocket engagement one American division, first the 36th and later the 3rd, was conspicuous in the operations of the First French Army. During December any gain on the Colmar front was made at high cost in the face of unfavorable weather and terrain and against ferocious resistance aided by heavy concentrations of artillery;

and frequently a gain was followed immediately by one or a number of German counterattacks, which were usually repulsed but were always costly and sometimes necessitated withdrawal.

General De Lattre, commanding the First French Army, made an estimate of the situation on 12 December:

The increased stiffening of enemy resistance following upon the arrival of large reinforcements of fresh troops (infantry and tanks) coming from Germany, the floods covering the Alsatian Plain, and the weariness of our units, lead to the conclusion, at the present time, that it may not be possible to effect immediately the complete reduction of the German bridgehead west of the Rhine.

The General stated, however, that it was his intention to use "all available forces" as soon as possible to accomplish three essential objectives: Move out from the Vosges at all costs in the Alsatian Plain and reach at least the bank of the Ill River; liberate Colmar and Cernay; and, in the event of circumstances being favorable, reach the Rhine at Brisach. The General was not hopeful that his orders of 2 December, that the Rhine be reached at Brisach, could be accomplished soon.

French II Corps was given the mission of proceeding in the direction of Kaysersberg-Colmar-Rouffach, the latter city being the principle army effort. The corps was to take Colmar, outflanking the town widely so as to avoid as far as possible its destruction, and join the I Corps at Rouffach. In the west the corps was to go in the direction of Munster and close the Fecht River Valley. In the east the troops were to advance in the general direction of Marckolsheim and Neuf-Brisach, to continue at least as far as the bank of the Ill between Selestat and Ste. Croix en Plaine east of Colmar. The corps was to be ready "constantly to exploit any favorable opportunity of reaching the Rhine at Brisach." The principle effort in the west was scheduled to start on 15 December, and the covering action in the east was to be launched on 13 December.

The I Corps mission, as outlined in the same directive of 12 December, was to attack in the direction Cernay (Sennheim)-Rouffach, taking Cernay and linking up with II Corps in Rouffach. It was also to attempt to reach the bank of the Ill between Mulhouse and Ste. Croix

en Plaine. The action against Cernay was to begin on 13 December, and the maximum effort was to be put forth from 15 December onward.

As preparations for attack were being made, SHAEF sent a message to General Devers at Sixth Army Group pointing out, "From all indications the enemy is sending replacement personnel for his divisions in the Colmar bridgehead and intends to hold it. You should regard elimination of this bridgehead, which is now occupying eight of our divisions, of great importance." General Devers informed SHAEF that in order to facilitate operations against the bridgehead he had ordered on 13 December the immediate relief of the 36th Infantry Division by the 3rd Infantry Division. The relief had already been started when the General wrote on 14 December, "The 36th Infantry Division has been constantly in the line since 15 August and in addition has been badly shaken up by heavy German counterattacks during the last three days. This Division's condition has been thoroughly investigated by me and I am convinced that it will not be ready for offensive battle before early January."

It was understood at Sixth Army Group Headquarters that the "virtual stalemate" on the First French Army front was due to factors other than enemy replacements. Contributing also to the difficult situation were the extensive flooded areas and the depletion of the French units. Replacements for the companies, many of which were down to platoon strength, were difficult to obtain. By the end of December conditions in the French forces were still grave. As General Devers wrote General Eisenhower, "The French First Army is short approximately 8,000 Infantry Replacements, is composed largely of colonial troops who present a serious morale problem due to shortage of officers with experience in handling colonial troops, and is badly in need of re-fitting and re-training."

The mid-December attacks were launched by the two French Corps in spite of the difficulties they faced, but they met stubborn resistance and enemy counterattacks. Advances were small or non-existent, and a week after the opening of the attack none of the objectives had been secured. By that time, 22 December, Sixth Army Group, bowing to the pressure being exerted on the Twelfth Army Group in

the Ardennes sector and elsewhere, officially went on the defensive. As Letter of Instructions No. 6 put it, "Sixth Army Group goes on the defensive and relieves certain elements of the Twelfth Army Group. Subject to securing essential lines of communication, Sixth Army Group will be prepared to yield ground rather than endanger the integrity of its forces. Sixth Army Group will continue the offensive on the south to reduce the Colmar Pocket, destroy the Germans west of the Rhine and defend that line."

In the First French Army orders contained in Letter of Instructions No. 6, there was a blend of offensive and defensive directions. Two main efforts were to be made by the First French Army as soon as possible. One, from the north, was to be directed so as to capture Colmar, thereafter exploiting in the direction of Brisach. The other, from the south, had as its objectives the capture of Cernay, the cutting of the road net in the Guebwiller area, and thereafter exploiting in the direction of Brisach. This plan differed from that of 12 December only in details. But it was accompanied by the following defensive instructions:

All areas in which offensive operations are not being immediately conducted will be completely wired in and protected by mine fields without delay. All avenues of approach in these areas, especially those suitable for armor will be extensively mined. In addition all roads in these areas will be covered by roadblocks. Tactical wire, mine fields (natural and artificial) will be defended by fire.

Two days later Sixth Army Group underlined the defensive character of the situation by sending the following message to the Commanding General, First French Army:

To meet possible enemy capabilities pending your offensive it is essential, that rearward defensive positions be reconnoitered and prepared by your command immediately. These positions must be sited so as to definitely block any enemy thrust through the Belfort Gap, through your center, or through your north flank. These defenses must be in great depth, taking maximum advantages of terrain and natural obstacles.

The attitude and efforts of the Allied forces became progressively more defensive as December came to a close. The French First Army General Order No. 201, issued 30 December, indicated clearly

that by that time the idea of an Allied offensive in the Colmar Pocket had been temporarily abandoned. The order explained that operations in Belgium and Luxembourg had necessitated a regrouping of forces and the present defensive attitude on the First French Army front. It pointed out that the enemy might take advantage of the facilities offered him by the Black Forest cover and his present bridgehead on the west bank of the Rhine to launch a counter-offensive on the Colmar front which might cut Allied lines of communications between Luxembourg and the Rhine at Basel. The general scheme of defense, in view of these considerations, called for principle efforts to protect the Belfort Gap in the south and Strasbourg and the right flank of the Seventh Army in the north. The army was to be prepared to fight in depth in the Vosges positions lying on each flank but to hold the line of passes in the central Vosges "with no thought of withdrawal." One or two divisions were to be maintained in reserve "for dealing with any eventuality."

The mission of the I Corps was primarily to protect the Belfort Gap and to deny the enemy access to the Vosges passes. Mulhouse was to be "held solidly", and the most important mountain defenses were to be in the Bussang and Schlucht area. In the event of a breakthrough the corps was to "limit and contain the enemy advance by clinging to the various natural terrain openings between the Vosges and the Swiss frontier."

II Corps was to protect Strasbourg and the Seventh Army right flank by opposing enemy crossings of the Rhine between Rhinau and the northern French Army boundary. It was also to deny the enemy access to the Vosges valleys between Selestat and Orbey, making the most important defensive effort along the axis Selestat-Ste. Marie-aux-Mines. "In the event of a breakthrough or of the evacuation of the Strasbourg area by Seventh Army" the corps was to withdraw toward the Vosges in close contact with the right wing of the American army. The final holding line passed through Molsheim and Kaysersberg on the east edge of the Vosges, the ridges south of Lapoutroie and the Bonhomme Pass.

Reference has already been made to the need, as seen by General Devers, of the French Army for re-fitting and re-training at the

end of the month. Because of the rehabilitation the French were undergoing, General Devers found it advisable to continue to "bolster" the French Army with the American 3rd Division, which had replaced the

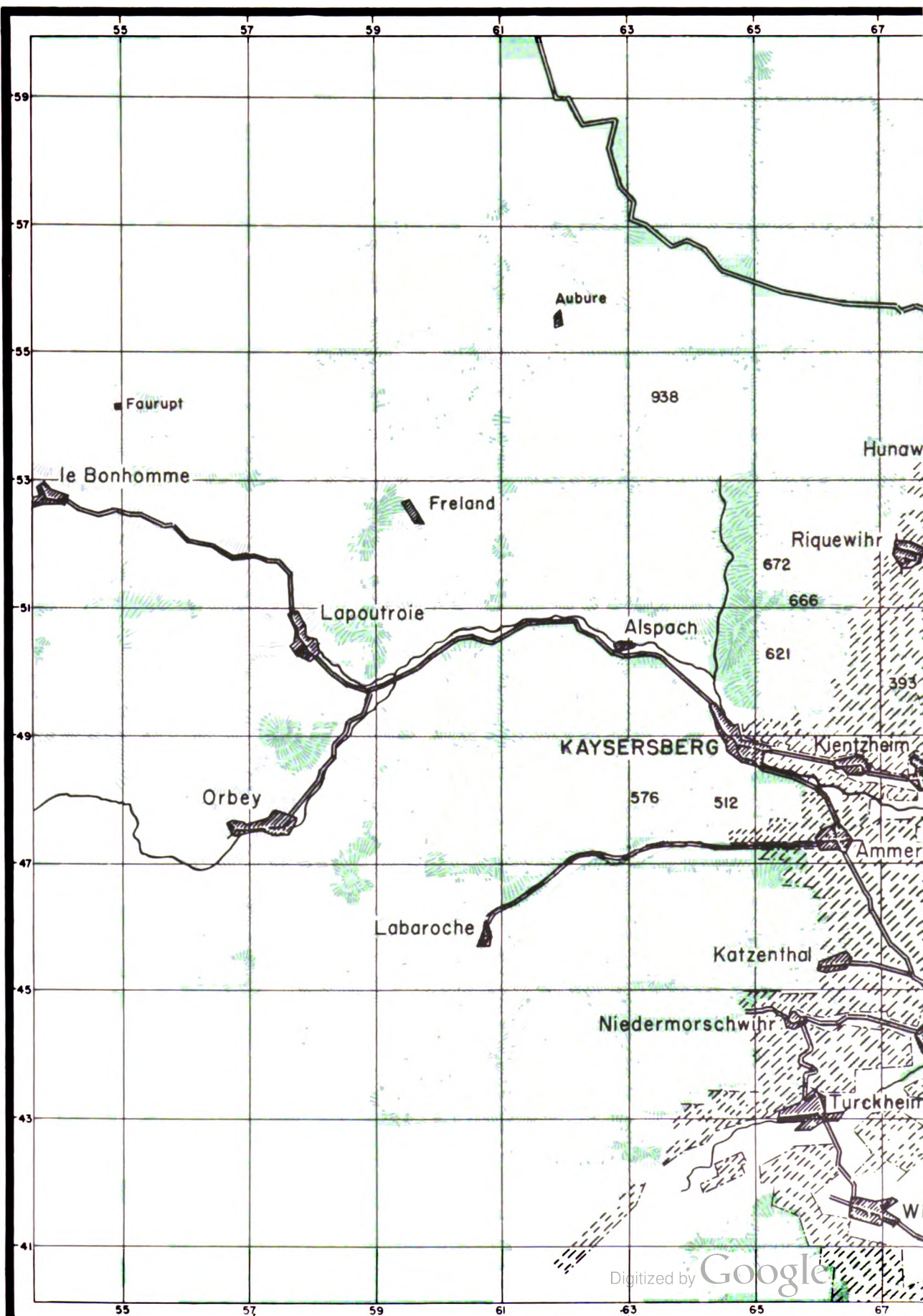


FRENCH SELF PROPELLED GUN FIRING INTO THE RHINE VALLEY

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36th Division on the Colmar front. On 31 December General Devers wrote General Eisenhower: "When the French Army has completed its program of re-fitting and re-training sufficiently, I hope to be able to withdraw the 3rd Division and return it to Patch, but this will not be possible within the next 6 weeks, in my opinion."

At the end of the year 1944 both the American Seventh and the French First Armies had prepared primary and secondary lines of defense and were ready to counterattack whatever German thrusts might be made. Troops dug in along the front were waiting for the next move



which the Germans were apparently preparing to make. December had, however, been a month of hard, unrewarding engagements along the rim of the Colmar Pocket, in which engagements both the American 36th and 3rd Divisions had participated.

36th Division Operations

On 4 December all regiments of the 36th Division had been heavily engaged in the line between Selestat and the Bonhomme Pass on the VI Corps right flank. On the division left flank the 3rd Battalion of the 142nd Infantry had continued fighting in the city of Selestat, largely against enemy sniper action, while the other two battalions had cleared the towns of Kintzheim and St. Hippolyte southwest of Selestat. On that day the 2nd Battalion of the 143rd Infantry, attached to the 142nd Regiment, also fought in Selestat. The other two battalions of the 143rd Infantry in the division center were engaged in consolidating positions in Ribeauville, which they had recently taken, and held this front against three light counterattacks. On the division right flank two battalions of the 141st Infantry were on 4 December fighting south from Aubure and east from Faurupt, seeking to secure the western entrance to the Kaysersberg Valley, through which the Weiss River flows eastward to the Rhine Plain. At 0001 hours on 5 December the 36th Division, relieved from VI Corps, was attached for operations to the First French Army.

The immediate objective of the 141st Infantry was the town of Lapoutroie between the Bonhomme Pass and Kaysersberg on the main St. Die-Colmar highway. Just northeast of Lapoutroie is the mountain village of Freland. After a morning of converging action the 2nd and 3rd Battalions established contact in Freland at 1320 hours on 5 December, and the town was reported free of the enemy. When a company attempted to move south toward Lapoutroie, it met opposition, which had to be cleared. At 1925 hours the regimental commander ordered a patrol sent to Lapoutroie. If the town was unoccupied, troops were to move in. If Germans still held the town it was to be subjected to an artillery barrage and the job of attacking it turned over to French



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Goumiers, 1,500 of whom had been attached to the 141st Infantry that morning in anticipation of their relieving the regiment.

By 2230 hours Company K had worked a reinforced platoon into Lapoutroie without encountering the enemy. Company L had also pushed a platoon into the town. During the night the battalion was notified that its relief by the Goumiers would begin at 0900 hours on 6 December. The operation was to be speeded as much as possible and not on a man-for-man basis. At 1000 hours on 6 December the elements of Companies K and L in Lapoutroie were counterattacked. Orders were to hold the town and remain in position until the situation cleared up. By 1303 hours, however, the enemy had driven Company K from Lapoutroie and the high ground around it and captured two squads of Company L. The 3rd Battalion Commander was about to commit Company I to regain the lost ground, but the regimental commander ordered the battalion to leave the sector as soon as possible and the French to take over immediately.

The 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment, which had been in reserve, had already been attached to the 142nd Regimental Combat Team for the purpose of garrisoning Selestat. The 2nd Battalion of the 141st Infantry was to be removed to the vicinity of Bergheim and the 3rd Battalion to St. Hippolyte. Both Battalions, after moving to these positions north of Ribeauville and on the edge of the Rhine Plain, would come into the line between the 142nd and 143rd Regiments.

On 5 December, however, the sector of the 142nd Regiment on the 36th Division left flank linked up with that of the 143rd Infantry on the south at Bergheim, included Selestat, and reached to the north to seal the front by contact with the French 2nd Armored Division. The chief barrier to any advance southeast by the 142nd Infantry was the flooded Ill River. This was the enemy's next line of defense. The next major tactical problem was the crossing of the flooded plain in order to make penetration eastward to the Rhine or to envelop Colmar. Reconnaissance troop elements sent to secure four possible bridging sites failed to do so before the enemy had prepared them for the defense.

Two missions were undertaken on the night of 5-6 December by companies from the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 142nd Infantry.

Company F was sent south and east from Selestat to secure either of two bridges over the Ill or, if these were not to be had, to seize the town and crossing at Illhaeusern, about 5 miles south of Selestat. Advance patrols found the bridges above Illhaeusern blown. An attack on Illhaeusern was impracticable, because the company found itself surrounded by waist-deep water in the approaches. The company then withdrew to Rerschwihr. The other mission was to cross the Ill near a blown bridge at the southeast corner of Selestat. Before dawn the third platoon of Company C made a surprise crossing about 500 yards south of the bridge site. The platoon had a leaky, shell-riddled rubber boat, on which men crossed three at a time, though the last three had to swim when the boat sank. A hard fight ensued when the enemy discovered the crossing, and a second platoon was sent to help. After some delay a footbridge was installed. Before noon on 6 December a firm bridgehead was secured and the enemy driven from the houses in that area. Any additional advance was limited, however, to a single road cut by another bridge 1,000 yards to the south.

Preparations were made on 6 December to push out to the southeast from the Selestat bridgehead. The 2nd Battalion was alerted to follow through if the second bridge could be seized. A platoon of Company C tried to make a crossing similar to the one of the night before. But the Germans were using an underground shelter as a fortified position at the crossing and were extremely alert along the length of the stream. A crossing place could not be found. One platoon of Company A was to make a second attempt before daylight, but heavy enemy shelling turned the platoon back. Unable to overcome the difficulties that faced its offensive action, the 142nd Regiment went on the defensive. The flood condition also existed north of Selestat and blocked the advance of the French 2nd Armored Division, which tied in on the regiment's left.

The 143rd Infantry was in the meantime driving south and east from Ribeauville. It had taken Hunawihr, Riquewihr, Zellenberg, and high ground to the west on 4 December while still a part of VI Corps. On the next day the 3rd Battalion advanced east toward Guemar and Ostheim, outposts on the Rhine Plain and on the Fecht River at the

northern and southern edges of the Colmar Forest. The attack was carried south of Ribeauville to Beblenheim by the 1st Battalion, a movement designed to clear high ground overlooking Colmar.



ARTILLERY PREPARATION

"... the attack was carried south of Ribeauville . . . a movement designed to clear high ground overlooking Colmar . . ."

Heavy fighting resulted when the enemy resisted stubbornly, holding the three towns against determined attacks. At Guemar the opposition was fanatical. Germans fired at their comrades who tried to surrender, shouted "Heil Hitler", and swore. As darkness came on, one platoon of Company C was entering Beblenheim; Company L had a firm hold on Guemar; and elements had got into the western fringe of Ostheim. Prisoners stated that they had been expecting reinforcements from across the Rhine and had been told that the bridgehead must be held at all costs.

During the night approximately 60 Germans infiltrated on the

regimental southern flank with bazookas and antitank weapons. The 2nd Battalion was assigned the mission of securing the Riquewihr-Zellenberg ridge against this threat. The enemy had reinforced his positions under attack during darkness, and bitter fighting was general throughout the day. That night, 5-6 December, however, Guemar was cleared; and the half of Ostheim on the west side of the Fecht River was taken. Beblenheim was considered clear by 1900 hours though the enemy made constant attempts to infiltrate into the town. Positions were set up on high ground overlooking Mittelwihr, Sigolsheim, and Bennwihr by regimental troops which withstood enemy attacks in that vicinity.

The night of 6-7 December passed uneventfully for the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 143rd Infantry, though a counterattack was expected. Enemy mortars and artillery were active all night with harassing fire. In the morning Germans were found to have infiltrated regimental positions, and Company L was sent to drive them off.

During the next few days, 7-10 December, action was centered in the cluster of hills within the arc formed by the towns of Kaysersberg, Kientzheim, Sigolsheim, Bennwihr, Mittelwihr, and Beblenheim. Positions changed hands several times, as troops of the 143rd Regiment and the enemy employed attack, counterattack, and infiltration with heavy supporting fire. On 7 December the enemy fired mortars, artillery, machine guns, and antitank weapons against hill positions occupied by the 2nd Battalion. A prisoner captured during the early morning said that about 120 men were to attack two of the hills during the day. The second of two counterattacks launched by the enemy after heavy preparatory fire forced Company F to retire from its positions by 1730 hours. American troops dug in on reverse slopes and held fast. Prisoners captured in Guemar, which was attacked all day by enemy attempting to infiltrate by crossing the Fecht River on boats, indicated that large groups of reinforcements were coming to Colmar to attack and secure all the high ground northwest of Colmar in American hands.

Just before 0800 hours on 8 December Mittelwihr, a strong enemy salient in the division line, was subjected to heavy tank and 4.2 mortar fire. At about 1020 hours the enemy laid down a heavy artillery and mortar concentration on the American lines. Following this ex-

change of fire the enemy attacked at noon from the direction of Mittelwihr and Bennwihr, driving troops from some high ground positions. Companies E and G were pulled back to reorganize and prepare to retake positions lost. The 1st Battalion attacked Mittelwihr but was halted about 25 yards from the outskirts of the village by an intense enemy artillery barrage, which dispersed troops and caused a number of casualties.

A general attack of the 141st and 143rd Regiments was planned to move off at 0800 hours on 9 December. The 1st Battalion of the 143rd again attacked Mittelwihr with supporting fire from high ground. By



THE SHELL TORN TOWN OF MITTELWIHR WHICH CHANGED
HANDS SEVERAL TIMES

" . . . The 1st Battalion of the 143rd again attacked Mittelwihr with supporting fire from high ground. By noon troops and armor were in the town . . . "

noon troops and armor were in the town, clearing Germans out of buildings. Concentrations of artillery and mortar fire were placed on the

advancing troops by the Germans, who were determined not to lose the town; but by mid-afternoon the battalion had cleared Mittelwihr and continued the attack southward toward Bennwihr. Progress was very slow in the face of intense enemy fire of all types. Prisoners of war captured in Mittelwihr reported that Bennwihr had been heavily reinforced by infantry and armor. In view of the coming darkness and the difficulty of control in village fighting at night, the battalion dug in on the outskirts of Mittelwihr and called for heavy harassing artillery fires to be laid on Bennwihr that night. The fire did not begin until 0400 hours of 10 December because of the belief that some of the battalion's men were still in Bennwihr.

Attacking with the 143rd Regiment on 9 December the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 141st Regiment moved out to secure the hills above Kientzheim and Sigolsheim and to take Sigolsheim, the town which dominated the eastern approaches to Kaysersberg. The opposition at all points was exceedingly bitter. Some fire was received from friendly tanks and tank destroyers in Zellenberg. Supporting artillery placed heavy concentrations around the edges of Kientzheim to the west, and two companies of the 1st Battalion, against heavy resistance, crawled over high ground and by 1325 hours had some elements in Sigolsheim. These advance troops were receiving heavy shelling, and Germans were reported to have moved in behind them. Supporting infantry and tanks moved to the assistance of the troops in Sigolsheim. By nightfall both battalions of the 141st Infantry were on the hills overlooking Kientzheim and Sigolsheim; the 1st Battalion had one company isolated in Sigolsheim. Two platoons which had proceeded in the direction of Bennwihr were in the process of being called back. The platoons, which had expected to link with elements of the 143rd, had met nothing but Germans, with whom they had had a stiff fight.

Both the 141st and 143rd Regiments received heavy artillery fire and constant harassing attacks on 10 December. All elements had to be constantly alert and active to maintain positions. Enemy fire was so heavy as to preclude anything except limited attacks to keep the enemy from disrupting positions. Most of the company which had been isolated in Sigolsheim remained out of contact.

The 36th Division had been in combat continuously since 15 August, and the strain was beginning to tell. On 9 December Brigadier General W. W. Hess, Division Artillery Commander, called on General Patch. General Hess requested that Seventh Army attach "one company of Flash and Sound, and also Combat Aviation, to the 36th Division for the present operations." General Hess stated that his artillery was receiving intense artillery fire of all calibers, but that the French could do nothing about it. The matter was referred to the Sixth Army Group.

Early in December Major General John E. Dahlquist, Division Commander, had requested that steps be taken to allow him to reestablish the combat efficiency of his organization. In a note to Sixth Army Group, Seventh Army forwarded the opinion of General Dahlquist that "his troops are being subjected to the most terrific continuous artillery fire they have ever faced with small chance to strike back. He will carry out his orders, but in accomplishing the mission given him, his tired, depleted troops will be dissipated and in a short time cease to exist." On 11 December General Patch sent a letter by special officer courier to the Commanding General, Sixth Army Group, to say that the Commanding General, 36th Division, considered his unit desperately in need of relief and rehabilitation. Accompanying this letter was the letter from General Dahlquist, dated 2 December 1944, and dealing with "Reestablishment of the Combat Efficiency of the 36th Infantry Division." Another inclosure was a map of the Colmar area, to which were affixed notes made by the Chief of Staff, Seventh Army, on his conversation with General Dahlquist. Shortly before midnight on 11 December the officer courier returned to Seventh Army Headquarters with a message from Sixth Army Group, stating that the 36th Division would be relieved by the 3rd Division, then occupying the Strasbourg area, as soon as practicable.

On 11 December the 141st and 143rd Regiments attacked in their sectors, while the 142nd Infantry remained in a defensive position, holding Selestat, where it had been since 7 December. The 3rd Battalion of the 143rd Infantry attacked Bennwihr at 1015 hours. Elements moved quickly into the edge of the town but soon met the direct fire of an enemy tank which dominated the main street. While artillery fire was con-

centrated on the tank, infantrymen worked slowly through the town and were half-way through it by nightfall. The attack of the 141st Regiment was delayed by enemy infiltration, but at noon the 1st Battalion struck to relieve elements out of contact in Sigolsheim. The enemy threw a heavy smoke screen over the entire valley extending from Sigolsheim to Bennwihr. Stubborn resistance bogged down the advance, and artillery was directed to place defensive and counterbattery fires to assist the battalion in returning to original positions. During the night the 3rd Battalion relieved the 1st Battalion, which then moved to Riquewihr.

The Germans opened a general attack on all sectors of the division front on 12 December. During the night patrols had noticed extensive enemy movement, particularly around Ammerschwihr, Kientzheim, Kaysersberg, and Colmar. By morning the enemy had infiltrated above Ribeauville, into Beblenheim, and between Beblenheim and Mittelwihr. He proceeded to launch strong attacks on Bennwihr and Riquewihr and directed 1,000 men, elements of four regiments, against Selestat.

The enemy made marked initial penetrations into the defended areas around Riquewihr and Selestat. Bitter and exhausting fighting succeeded in erasing most of the German advances by nightfall. As the enemy withdrew, he laid heavy artillery barrages in the area he had vacated. During the succeeding night the enemy infiltrated demolition parties, which tried unsuccessfully to eliminate American artillery positions. Enemy pressure continued to be applied constantly through the division sector.

During the next two days the enemy drive continued. On 13 December another enemy attack on Selestat was broken by artillery, but the enemy focused his attentions on the towns and hills between Sigolsheim and Beblenheim and in the area west of that line. There was hardly a time when groups of enemy were not infiltrating or attacking frontally, and artillery and tank support was much in evidence. The Germans pushed a group of 150 men as far north and west as a point 2,000 yards north of Kaysersberg. The Germans contested every hill and town position in the area held by the two regiments, which were supported

by the 111th Engineer Combat Battalion. The enemy reoccupied Mittelwihr, on which rallying American forces were advancing on the night of 14 December. The Germans also reoccupied the hills in the arc from Kaysersberg to Beblenheim. At 2000 hours on 14 December the enemy was reported to have broken through north of Mittelwihr. The Americans had been pushed back from the heights overlooking the Kaysersberg Valley.

The Enemy

Although all factors appeared to be against the enemy in maintaining his positions west of the Rhine and high ground which he still controlled in the Vosges Mountains, there were nevertheless indications that the Germans were planning to withdraw only to a final bridgehead probably in the vicinity of Neuf-Brisach. The Germans could still be counted on to make maximum use of limited resources and to contest the division advance with determination until all hope of maintaining their positions had gone.

When it was relieved from operation in the Colmar Pocket, the 36th Division was well able to testify to the tenacity of the enemy. And yet the enemy had issued on 3 November a withdrawal plan to be used in case of complete Allied occupation of Alsace. Certain precautions in view of this possible occupation by the Allies had already been taken. As late as 10 December it appeared to VI Corps that the German Nineteenth Army was making a withdrawal out of Alsace. Considerable movement was observed in enemy rear areas; and 500 trucks were reported moving east from Colmar and crossing the Rhine River at the Brisach Bridge, which was heavily smoked. Enemy withdrawal appeared slow and methodical, and motor transport movements converging on Colmar were reported continuing east at night.

But a captured Battle News Sheet, apparently issued before Christmas, reveals that the German mission was to continue to hold central Alsace. As it was explained to the German soldier,

Since 16 November 1944 the enemy attack on the Ruhr and Saar area, as well as Alsace, has been proceeding. Already the strengthen-

ing of the German weapons is effective. We, in Alsace, held up the enemy in the spurs of the Vosges for two full months. His push into Strasbourg and Mulhouse has not given him possession of entire Alsace. He suffered heavy losses and had to employ numerous divisions which he could have used in other sectors Mail, furloughs, Christmas, all that will come again after the battle has been decided and the enemy beaten. What will not come again is the opportunity of this winter Let us be watchful, concentrate all our will power, fight. *For Whoever Wins This Winter Will Win This War!*

The German soldier receiving this explanation was, according to an article in the 15 December issue of *Die Wacht*, the newspaper of the Nineteenth Army, fighting one of the toughest of defensive battles. Between the floridly patriotic lines of the article may be read the situation of the defenders:

Up on the crests of the Vosges, the Western-most positions are covered by the deep snow, enveloped in the bitter cold, and from there, through the lowlands of the Rhine Plain, continues the row of foxholes which for weeks have been filled to the brim with water by the pouring rain.

For days and weeks they have had no rest and they have simply dropped the word "relief" from their vocabulary a long time ago. Their uniforms hardly ever get dry, and they are yellowish from the mud and dirt. Their sleep they have to steal, bit by bit In every squad there yawns many a painful gap, but the men who survive get together more closely, fight all the more stubbornly against barrages and dive-bombers, against tanks, Shermans, Renaults, Churchills, and against infantry

In the December days of the sixth year of war a new part of German history and heroism is being written here in Alsace, and sealed with the blood of many German soldiers.

Doubtlessly contributing to the strength of enemy resistance in Alsace is the fact that the Nineteenth Army was subordinate to the overall command of Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler. A personal order issued by teletype on 20 December to the Nineteenth Army and the XIV and XVIII SS Corps reflects his determination to mobilize all possible manpower for the fight for Alsace. Himmler ordered all supply troops and similar rear-echelon units situated on the right bank of the Rhine to vacate their private quarters by 2 January 1945. They were to be placed in defense positions of the West Wall and the Black Forest

and were to dig their own field fortifications. These were to be incorporated within the regular fortification system. Should the enemy attack, these troops were ordered to fight in their dug-outs and emplacements to the last man.



THESE ELITE TROOPS WERE TO FIGHT TO THE LAST BREATH

"... Should the enemy attack, these troops were ordered to fight in their dug-outs and emplacements to the last man . . ."

A German order issued in the vicinity of Sigolsheim and dated 26 December contained the injunction that Sigolsheim be held and states that this was in accordance with repeated written orders just received from the Commander-in-Chief, Upper Rhine, Reichsfuehrer SS Himmler. Himmler's Bodyguard Battalion was identified in action on the Upper Rhine, and the 3rd Division had many reports that Himmler was present in his special train. German resistance throughout the month of December on the rim of the Colmar Pocket remained at a strength inspired by fanaticism.

3rd Division Enters the Stalemate

During the period 15-21 December when their relief was gradually being accomplished by the 3rd Division, units of the 36th Division continued to battle in the hills north of the Kaysersberg Valley. Heavy enemy activity in this area slowed the process of relief, as unit took the place of unit fighting on the line. The 30th Infantry, which was the first of 3rd Division regiments to move from Strasbourg to the Colmar front, completed its transfer on 14 December and entered the line on the right flank of the 36th Division.

On 15 December, while elements of the 141st and 143rd Regiments were attacking once again south through the hills toward Kintzheim and Sigolsheim, the 30th Regiment made an assault against the higher hills just north of Kaysersberg. In a two day fight troops of the 30th Infantry drove the enemy from these High Vosges positions and prepared to cross the Weiss River northwest of Kaysersberg to seize high ground to the south and to assault the town itself. During the night 16-17 December the 1st Battalion passed through 2nd Battalion positions, at 0625 hours in the morning crossed an engineer-constructed footbridge near the northwestern end of Kaysersberg, and by noon that day had occupied high ground south of Kaysersberg. At 0905 hours that morning the 3rd Battalion entered Kaysersberg and fought toward the southeast, meeting enemy small arms, mortar and artillery fire. Enemy tanks from the southern and eastern end of the town fired into American positions.

On 17 December the enemy counterattacked both in Kaysersberg and against the hill mass across the river. The 1st Battalion south of the town gave ground at first, later regained it, and then consolidated its positions while repeated attacks were smashed by concentrations of fire from artillery, mortars, and automatic weapons. Each time the enemy advanced against the 1st Battalion, he withdrew again with severe losses. The counterattack in Kaysersberg, launched from the direction of Kientzheim, succeeded in retaking a considerable portion of the town. The 3rd Battalion continued its fight to hold Kaysersberg through the afternoon in a house-to-house battle. The enemy reinforced positions

with armor and infantry from the east, until Kientzheim was taken by French tanks attacking from the north through the 141st Regiment's position. The next morning French armor and infantry jumped off from Kientzheim at 0900 hours, fighting their way into the eastern section of Kayzersberg. American troops of the 30th Infantry and French troops linked at 1150 hours and proceeded to sweep all buildings in the town, which was virtually clear by 1730 hours on 18 December.

With the taking of Kayzersberg, Kientzheim, and the surrounding hills, Allied forces had broken enemy power in the valley. The enemy withdrew south of the Ammerschwihr-Labaroche axis, and French and American forces took Ammerschwihr. On 18 December the 2nd Battalion of the 143rd Infantry had moved into Mittelwihr. The next day elements of the regiment entered Sigolsheim but withdrew because it was not possible to complete the capture of the town before nightfall. The remainder of the period during which gradual relief of the 36th Division was taking place was given over to the mopping up of towns taken and the hill areas adjacent to them. As the period progressed, enemy attacks slackened; and the units spent 20 and 21 December establishing themselves in their new positions, setting up defenses, and patrolling.

When the 3rd Division had completed relief of the 36th Division on 21 December, it had control of the whole Kayzersberg Valley except for Bennwihr and Sigolsheim. The Germans still controlled the exits from the valley to the east. Accordingly, on the morning of 23 December the 15th Infantry started an operation to gain control of these positions, while the 7th and 30th Regiments held the sector taken over from the 36th Division.

Elements of the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry, attacked Bennwihr, jumping off to the south through Mittelwihr, covered by fire from the 2nd Battalion. The battalion encountered an enemy strongpoint in the convent west of Bennwihr and well-organized heavy resistance from the town. Bitter fighting took elements of two companies into the outskirts of the village; but shortly after dark the enemy counterattacked in strength, supported by tanks, artillery, and mortar fire, causing the battalion to withdraw and reorganize. The next day, 24 December,

Company I entered Bennwihr against scattered resistance, but in the town it was strongly opposed by infantry and tanks. The school house proved to be the outstanding strongpoint in the town, being captured once, then recaptured by the enemy, and remaining in enemy hands at nightfall. Company I dug in positions on the outskirts of the town and remained in them during the night. Attacking the town from the east, Companies K and L cleared Bennwihr on Christmas Day after house-to-house fighting. Elements of the 1st Battalion then made an unsuccessful attempt to clear the hill northeast of Sigolsheim.

Fighting continued in this sector during Christmas Day and the days following without much gain by either side. As the high ground to the north and east of Sigolsheim was slowly being cleared by troops of the 15th Infantry, the town underwent heavy artillery and aerial bombardment for two days. After six days of bitter fighting Sigolsheim was finally cleared of enemy on 28 December.

During the days that followed, the American 3rd Division remained in the line on the Colmar front without participating in any significant engagements, waiting for the First French Army to complete its rehabilitation and its plans for a new offensive against the Colmar Pocket. As the old year came to a close, the front in Alsace in a long, sweeping, reverse-S curve from French positions on the Rhine near Mulhouse, through the High Vosges and 3rd Division positions in the Kaysersberg Valley, through Strasbourg, and northeast through VI and XV Corps lines to St. Avold became suddenly quiet. The Germans were preparing to launch a counter-offensive, and the Allies were waiting for the first blows. The spirit of the Allied forces, though sober, was none the less confident. In a Christmas and New Year folder prepared at Seventh Army Headquarters for the holiday season a French soldier and an American soldier greet each other with raised glasses, General Patch wishes his men a joyful Christmas, and the text of the folder predicts that this is "the last Christmas on the Berlin road."

CHAPTER XXI

Support for the Vosges Campaign

WHEN the Seventh Army early in October arrived in the Epinal-Luneville sector along the Moselle, it was approximately 500 miles from the beaches and its ports of supply in southern France. By D plus 45 the army front was nearly three times the distance from Marseille and Toulon as that contemplated logistically for D plus 60. In addition to the tactical necessity for regrouping its forces before an advance through the Vosges and for giving some rest to tired troops, the Seventh Army was faced with the problem of heavily taxed supply lines. All factors contributed to the development of a static situation on the front. In the Seventh Army advance from the Moselle to the Rhine and the German border during the last three months of 1944 the services of supply were hard pressed to meet army requirements.

Personnel

Seventh Army's fighting strength jumped from three divisions on 1 October 1944 to 11 divisions on 31 December 1944. With this increase in troop strength came a corresponding increase in the personnel and replacement problem. Total monthly casualties mounted from 7,508 for October to 12,113 for December. The Vosges Campaign, with its bitter weather conditions, and the winter fight into the Siegfried Line caused heavy sick lists. Trench foot was a matter for considerable concern.

The problem of obtaining infantry and armored replacements during this period was a critical one. Shortly after the German offensive

struck in the Ardennes, Seventh Army had to turn over to Third Army 200 basics from each infantry regiment of the newly arrived 42nd, 63rd, and 70th Infantry Divisions. Near the end of December Sixth Army Group informed Seventh Army that, because of the recent allocation of replacements by higher headquarters, there would be little if any new manpower available to Seventh Army for several weeks, perhaps a month or more.

Since infantry units in Seventh Army then averaged about ten percent below strength while service units were at full strength, the army organized a short emergency program to convert to infantry ten percent of all units other than infantry, cavalry, combat engineers, chemical mortar battalions, and divisional artillery. The Conversion Center was set up at Thaon, France, under supervision of the 2nd Replacement Depot and afforded a means of providing a pool of infantry replacements for use during January. The Seventh Army program was later supplanted by a similar theater-wide conversion program.

Combat officers in junior grades were an equally grave replacement problem. When administrative control of Seventh Army forces was transferred from NATOUSA to ETOUSA on 1 November, a considerable number of junior officers who had been carried with combat units as overstrength had to be returned to replacement depots since ETOUSA replacement policy permitted no temporary duty for training or overstrength. Shortly thereafter combat units of company size were authorized one extra lieutenant. Since the replacement system was unable to furnish sufficient officer personnel in junior grades, Seventh Army gave priority to DRAGOON divisions, because the 3rd, 36th, and 45th Infantry Divisions had been in combat for two years and had virtually exhausted their stocks of officer material from non-commissioned ranks. It was felt that new divisions would be in a better position to fill their quotas by combat appointment.

During the rapid advance through southern France the establishment of rest centers and rotation of troops could receive little consideration. These matters became more pressing, however, when Seventh Army reached the Moselle and began its advance through the Vosges. The G-1 Section set up rest areas where practicable; but

conditions, notably the pressing need for combat troops and the race against time, made it impossible to give the front-line soldier much relief. For a considerable period even the small quota for rotation to the United States was stopped.

Logistics and the New Campaign

A build-up of reserves of ammunition, gasoline, rations and other essential supplies to support a sustained attack had not been possible. By the end of the first week of October the Seventh Army supply situation was critical. Rail deliveries were falling below tonnages considered essential to operations. Logistical planning had to be revised. It was the opinion of Sixth Army Group that had sufficient supplies been available the advance of DRAGOON forces could have continued through October, breaching the Vosges barrier with less cost in lives and time, and gaining tactical advantages of great importance. Army planning, however, could not alone correct a deficiency which reached back to the factories in America. Shortages in special supplies needed in the prosecution of the war reflected a critical condition existing in the Zone of Interior in October, since available stocks of certain items plus shipments already enroute comprised the total resources in the theater and also in the United States. Production schedules did not indicate any alleviation of the condition before a minimum of three, and probably six, months had elapsed.

Efforts were immediately concentrated, however, on building up the level of supplies in forward dumps to support the Seventh Army in its coming campaign. Administrative changes were announced in October revising operating agencies in the line of supply. Seventh Army was notified on 19 October that administrative responsibility for DRAGOON forces would be transferred from NATOUSA, which had mounted the operation and supplied it initially, to the European Theater of Operations on 1 November. Supply would remain a NATOUSA responsibility until a transfer day to be announced. Logistical support of the Sixth Army Group became a responsibility of Communications Zone, ETOUSA, on 20 November 1944. To accomplish the mission, the

Southern Line of Communications (SOLOC) was established within the Communications Zone under command of Major General Thomas B. Larkin, who was designated Deputy Commander, COMZONE. Meanwhile, direct supply of the Seventh Army had changed on 11 October from Delta Base Section to Continental Advance Section (CONAD), operating under the direction of SOLOC.

Addition of new divisions to the Seventh Army complicated the supply problem. Early in October it had planned that the army would embrace two corps with one armored and five infantry divisions in combat and two infantry divisions in rotation, together with attached



AN "I" BEAM IS ABOUT TO BE SET DURING THE RECONSTRUCTION
OF A RAILROAD BRIDGE

"... Engineer troops were engaged on an extensive program of rehabilitation and maintenance of rail and motor transport lines . . ."

service troops. These two corps, VI and XV, with a full complement of eight divisions were under Seventh Army command by 2 November.

Addition on 13 November of another armored division added to the demand on Ordnance for maintenance and parts. A third armored division was added on 5 December. Arrival of elements of three infantry divisions, the 42nd, 63rd, and 70th, in late December contributed to an army troop strength of 294,681 at the end of the year, almost double that of three months earlier.

Seventh Army faced its supply problems during the last months of 1944 under conditions imposed by the developments of its campaign. The transfer from the Mediterranean to the European Theater meant some change in policies and procedure which had to be adopted both in planning and procurement. It was also necessary to exploit to the fullest whatever supply facilities could be found in the Vosges. During the months of October, November, and December both gasoline and ammunition became critical items, and expenditures had to be made under the policy of building up reserves. Engineer troops were engaged on an extensive program of rehabilitation and maintenance of rail and motor transport lines in the army area. Special problems of supply arose from time to time as the Vosges campaign developed. With the coming of winter, procurement and distribution of supplies became focused on the needs of the individual soldier; clothing, food, and heat. Throughout the period it was necessary to give close support to units engaged in the line.

Supply Facilities in the Vosges

Transition from a day to day basis of supply during the rapid advance period, in which supply sections followed the army as closely as possible with as much of the necessary supplies as could be brought up with available transportation, to one with reserves was accomplished in the final quarter of 1944. To accomplish the task Seventh Army depended largely on truck transportation and the rapid rehabilitation of rail lines.

At the end of the first week in October opening of a railhead in the Vesoul area enabled the Army, then operating on the Epinal-

Luneville front, to begin gradual discontinuance of the long truck hauls; but time was required to build up reserves. To hasten the necessary build-up, the corps and divisions were called upon to furnish one truck company each for fast turn-around hauls between Epinal and Marseille until sufficient reserves could be assembled in forward areas to meet emergencies and provide a minimum back-log for future operations.

Inasmuch as rail lines soon would be extended into Epinal, forward supply points were established in that area. Ration and gasoline dumps were located at Luneville, Charmes, Mirecourt, and Epinal by 16 October with rear supply points located at St. Loup and Vesoul. Ammunition supply points were operated in the vicinity of Arbois, Luxeuil, Bayon, and Uzemain, while Quartermaster Class II and IV depots were maintained at Vesoul and Epinal.

As fighting progressed in the Vosges mountain region in November, supply points were pushed up to follow the forward troops as closely as possible. For VI Corps units ration and gasoline installations were opened in Rambervillers and Molsheim, with another gasoline dump operated at Clairefontaine and a ration point in St. Die. In the XV Corps sector ration, gasoline, and ordnance supply points were opened on 24 November near Luneville. Quartermaster Class II and IV installations were maintained at Epinal, Mirecourt, and Sarrebourg. In December ration dumps were advanced to Saverne, Mackwiller, and Schweighausen, while gasoline points were opened in Haguenau and Diemeringen. Main army supply points were located at Bayon and Uzemain during November. More forward points were opened in December at Durstel, Heming, Eschbach, and Dettwiller. The army supply point at Nelling was taken over from the Third Army during the short period when the 87th Infantry Division was under Seventh Army control.

Only by following forward troops as closely as possible could the Seventh Army give maximum supply support to its advancing divisions. The attempt to build up reserves was sometimes disturbed, but its importance cannot easily be overestimated. A fire in the Class I dump at Epinal on the night of 17-18 November resulted in the loss of 200,000 pounds of flour, salt, beans, powdered milk, sugar, and

accessory packs but did not result in a critical ration shortage in army dumps.

Additional troops and rapid tactical maneuvers on a wide front made Class I supply more difficult during December, especially the task of finding dump locations under cover. Many roads were made impassable by heavy winter rains which limited the location of forward dumps to areas serviced by the few remaining highways. Suitable locations found near the front would often be subjected to enemy artillery fire. By the end of the period it was necessary to reconsolidate supply installations in view of the over-all defensive plan and shifting



TRUCK SPLASHES THROUGH FLOOD WATERS UNDER DESTROYED
RAILROAD TRESTLE. FLOOD CONDITIONS HAVE LIMITED TRAFFIC
TO TRUCKS ONLY

" . . . Many roads were made impassable by heavy winter rains which limited the location of forward dumps to areas serviced by the few remaining highways . . . "

of troops. No material change was made in the main axis of supply through Sarrebourg, Saverne, and Haguenau. On 30 December plans

for the immediate future placed the bulk of supplies west of the Vosges Mountains with only limited operating levels of ammunition, rations, gasoline, and Engineer Class IV supplies to be maintained east of the Vosges and north of Sarrebourg.

Gasoline

Although gasoline had been one of the most critical items of supply during the first six weeks of the invasion of southern France, the slowing down of activities in October enabled the army to build up substantial reserves. Utilization of existing facilities was one of the main factors in establishing the reserve. Rehabilitation of storage tanks at Toulon, Marseille, and Port du Bouc had provided approximately 2,000,000 barrels of storage space. In Epinal additional gasoline facilities were exploited. There the Jeanne d'Arc bulk gasoline installations were found practically intact. Two steel storage tanks in good condition were found with a total capacity of approximately 15,000 barrels. A tank car unloading rack was constructed to handle 30 cars simultaneously, and a four-inch pipeline was built 2,340 feet to the storage tanks. An additional 3,040 feet of four-inch pipeline was laid to connect the storage tanks with a tank truck filling point. Gasoline could be pumped directly to tank trucks or storage tanks from tank cars. Average unloading time per tank car was 30 minutes, and the average turn-around time for tank cars from the base area was approximately 17 days.

The first handling of sizeable quantities of gasoline in bulk from rail tank cars began on 2 October at St. Loup, when a daily maximum of 150,000 gallons was unloaded directly to tank trucks and dispensing facilities. As the rail line did not extend to the Epinal region until the third week in October, a convoy refueling point was established at Thaon on the highway between Epinal and Nomexy. The installation consisted of an 8,000 gallon tank serviced by tank trucks.

The German installation at Nomexy, approximately 10 miles north of Epinal, provided considerable storage space together with 52,920 gallons of gasoline and 22,050 gallons of gas-oil mixture. It had apparently been used by the Germans as a canning and distributing

point and was badly damaged by bomb hits. The existing steel storage tanks were cleaned and repaired for gasoline service. Storage facilities for 270,000 gallons were placed in operation, including one 185,000-



**CONVOY REFUELING POINTS KEPT HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION
MOVING. AMPHIBIOUS DUKWS REFUEL FROM
AN 8,000 GALLON TANK**

"... A convoy refueling point was established at Thaon on the highway between Epinal and Nomexy. The installation consisted of an 8,000 gallon tank serviced by tank trucks..."

gallon tank and four 15,500-gallon tanks. Unloading facilities included accommodations for 18 cars, approximately 200 feet from the storage tanks. Five tank-truck loading risers were constructed 2,500 feet from storage tanks and connected by pipeline in such a way that gasoline could be pumped directly to tank trucks from tank cars or from storage tanks. Drum unloading racks were also installed.

Army operation of the La Forge installation at Sarrebourg began on 10 December with the reconditioning of facilities for 1,200,000 gallons. A 30 tank car unloading rack was installed, capable of emptying

100 cars per day. Facilities to decant 2,000 55-gallon drums daily into bulk storage were prepared here. Toward the end of December time-saving methods were introduced with the utilization of local filling



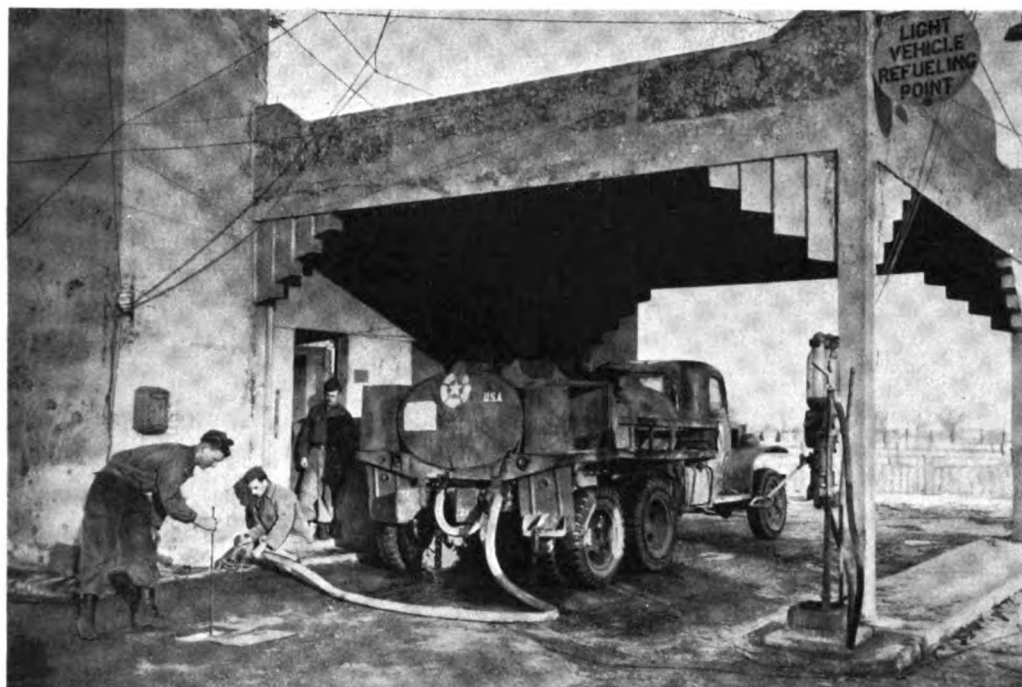
TANK TRUCKS FILL UP FROM RISERS

"... Five tank truck loading risers were constructed 2,500 feet from storage tanks and connected by pipeline in such a way that gasoline could be pumped directly to tank trucks from tank cars or from storage tanks . . ."

stations for military vehicle refueling. Operation of these stations considerably reduced the number of five gallon containers necessary for maintenance. A shortage of five gallon cans earlier had forced partial issues to units in 55-gallon drums.

Gasoline stocks within the army area dipped to critically low levels during December, necessitating a rationing program at the close of the month in order that adequate reserves could be developed to meet emergencies that might arise from the changing tactical situation. While a supply of 8.8 days of fuel was on hand on 3 December, transfer of the bulk installations at Nomexy and Jeanne D'Arc reduced the level to

3.5 days, or 1,010,277 barrels, on 10 December. In the following week the situation further deteriorated as army stocks of gasoline dropped to 237,710 gallons, or eight-tenths of a day of supply. Some improvement



**LOCAL FILLING STATIONS WERE UTILIZED FOR LIGHT VEHICLE
REFUELING POINTS**

" . . . Toward the end of December time-saving methods were introduced with the utilization of local filling stations for military vehicle refueling . . . "

was effected during the following week as the level was built up to 1.3 days of supply with 385,711 gallons on hand. The situation was considered sufficiently critical, however, for the Quartermaster to arrange for an emergency truck shipment of 100,000 gallons from the base section depot at Epinal. This supply together with the rationing of units to 75 percent of normal use resulted in a gain in the volume of receipts over issues, and the build-up of 768,684 barrels, or 2.7 days of supply, at the end of the year. Besides requests for additional gasoline it was necessary on 27 December to request an extra 20,000 gallons of medium weight motor oil.

Ammunition

A critical ammunition situation developed early in October which recurred periodically throughout the final quarter of 1944. Dwindling stocks in army dumps, as receipts from the base section declined, necessitated rationing of several types of artillery ammunition to the extent that peak efficiency could not be obtained from supporting artillery units. Some commanders felt that the lack of ammunition was lowering the morale of the troops. In VI Corps the dissemination of information on overall allocations of ammunition was prohibited below the level of infantry regiment or division artillery headquarters.

On 6 October the Seventh Army G-4 attributed the critical shortage in ammunition to the failure of the Communications Zone to meet bids for daily rail tonnage. Consumption of ammunition was at the rate of 1,000 tons daily, but on at least two days during the period only 20 tons had been received. Between 1 and 7 October the army had bid for 750 tons daily of ammunition, together with 225 tons of other ordnance items; but Sixth Army Group had allocated only 512 tons for all classes of ordnance supply. Since receipts did not coincide with requests, the acuteness of the ammunition problem increased.

By the end of the first week in October the stock of ammunition for the light artillery piece, 105mm Howitzer M2, had declined to three-tenths of an ETOUSA day of supply (40 rounds per weapon per day) or 5,627 rounds, and six-tenths of a day of supply for the 155mm howitzer (25 rounds per weapon per day). The decline had occurred in spite of rationing which had allocated for the first 25 days of October only 15.22 rounds per piece per day for the 155mm gun, 16 rounds for the 155mm howitzer, and 28.4 rounds for the 105mm howitzer. In the VI Corps a 20 percent reserve of the allocated quantities could be fired by units only on order of the corps commander. There was also a critical shortage of mortar ammunition, and restrictions were imposed for the same period. An average of 7.8 rounds of 60mm high explosive per piece per day, four rounds of 81mm high explosive light, and 3.5 rounds of 81mm high explosive heavy was allowed. Amounts allocated averaged between one-fifth and one-seventh of a unit of fire per day, except for the 155mm howitzer for which the amount was one-third of a unit of fire.

Uncertainty of receipts from the base section caused the Seventh Army to terminate the allocation system after the first two weeks of October. The army then advised corps of anticipated receipts for the period, quantities being released as available on a daily basis. Inability of ammunition supply points to meet allocations had exerted a limiting factor on artillery expenditure to a greater extent than the restrictions.

The combined effect was a lower tempo of activity, of which the G-4 of the 45th Infantry Division stated:

More attention was paid to the procurement, allocation, distribution and expenditure of ammunition by all echelons of command during October than any previous month in this Division's combat experience Division artillery is not being used to peak efficiency The continued difficulty with ammunition supply is one of the factors contributing to the slowdown of the present operations. There is no more important morale factor for combat troops than a good ammunition situation. Continued restrictions, month after month, produce lack of confidence and disgust in a system that is unable to supply at, theoretically, a period of maximum efficiency, sufficient ammunition

Ammunition worries beset the enemy at the same time. The Seventh Army Artillery Section, reporting on the period 21-28 October, stated that there had been a marked decrease in the number of enemy guns located during the past week. By 27 October the number of guns opposing the Seventh Army front had dropped from 335 to 270. The proportion of medium and heavy guns manned by the enemy likewise dropped. German artillery was experiencing the lack of reserves in both weapons and ammunition. Several dud shells were found to have dates as late as August 1944 stamped on them, and prisoners of war complained of the poor quality of "new guns." Apparently the enemy services of supply were moving guns and ammunition directly from factory to the front lines.

Two weeks later a message from General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, to the Theater Commander disclosed the existence in the Zone of the Interior of serious shortages of certain types of artillery ammunition, replacement cannon, and recoil mechanism. Reserves in the United States had been exhausted, which necessitated the scheduling

of current shipments direct from loading and production lines to dock sides. The War Department had directed the curtailment of ammunition expenditures. Seventh Army was, therefore, compelled to use its artillery sparingly; and reserve ammunition for a general offensive could be built up only at the expense of current operations.

Development in October of greater rail capacity from Marseille, where there was some ammunition in stock, brought increased receipts to Seventh Army and permitted the beginning of a build-up of needed reserves. Intermittent shortages of certain types of ammunition occurred, however, as a consequence of unexpected demands of unbalanced shipments. Stocks in army supply points reflected a gradually increasing number of days of supply on hand, although periodic recessions occurred. By 28 October a stock of 8.2 days of supply of 105mm howitzer M 2 ammunition had been accumulated, while for 155mm howitzers it was 8.8 days, for 155mm guns, 9.8 days, and for 81mm mortars, 7.4 days. Continued difficulty with 105mm howitzer ammunition was reflected in a decline to 3.8 days of supply on 27 November, while ammunition stocks for 155mm howitzers had risen to 16 days, for 155mm guns, 9.2 days, and for 81mm mortars, 10.3 days. After peaks had been reached in the first and second weeks of December, the army had on hand at the end of the year 8.4 days of 105mm howitzer M 2, 19.9 days of 155mm howitzer, 12.5 days of 155mm gun, and 8.8 days of 81mm mortar ammunition. During this period supplies were being hoarded for the coming drive against Germany.

After the October crisis a gradual build-up was undertaken with firm restrictions on expenditures, which enabled the army to meet demands during offensive periods. Firing reached such a volume by mid-December, however, that issues virtually equalled receipts, which precluded temporarily further development of reserves. Heaviest demand was for 155mm gun, 4.57 inch gun, and 105mm howitzer ammunition. Consumption exceeded the ETOUSA day of supply, but expenditures remained within the accumulated and period allocations.

Maintenance of adequate ammunition stocks in forward supply points within convenient distances to the combat troops had become a

problem by mid-December, as the advances had placed divisions 80 to 100 miles ahead of the largest army supply point at Bayon. Trucking from the Bayon dump and from the end of the rail line at Sarrebourg was necessary, and it was not possible to meet every demand from the forward points. The use of truck transportation and service troops, however, to move supplies of ammunition forward was kept at a minimum. Only when the rail lines in the Wissembourg-Haguenau area had been opened could stocks be built up in forward dumps. The transfer of a Third Army dump at Insming with 9,000 tons of ammunition to Seventh Army simplified the problem of supplying new organizations which had been transferred to the Seventh Army during the third week of December. Heaviest expenditures continued in 105mm howitzer and 155mm gun ammunition.

A new fuze, called POZIT or Proximity Fuze, was demonstrated to the artillery in November and made available during the latter part of December for use with the 105mm and 155mm weapons. Because of the nature of the explosion, it was to be fired only on corps order and artillery observation planes were to be grounded during the fire period. Artillery of XV Corps fired the POZIT fuze initially as a Christmas mission on German positions, and effective results on personnel targets were reported.

Rail and Motor Transport

Development of a semi-static tactical situation in early October with an impending attack on enemy lines in the Vosges Mountains made it imperative to rehabilitate railroads rapidly and to establish adequate supply lines to support the coming offensive. A demolished bridge over the Doubs River at Dole denied completion of rail lines into Vesoul until 5 October, placing an excessive burden on truck transportation that was not entirely relieved until November. To provide facilities which could accommodate heavier tonnage, work on double-track line up the Rhone River through Dijon was assigned first priority, although the single track "mountain line" through Grenoble was repaired with almost equal rapidity.

The Vesoul area was opened for substantial tonnage the first week in October with towns in the vicinity being utilized as supply points. Ammunition was stored at Aillevillers, gasoline at St. Loup, rations at Gonflans, and all other classes of quartermaster supply at Vesoul. More than 1,600 additional freight cars were acquired at Vesoul. A primary traffic control point was established at the Vaivre yards near Vesoul. The Clerval yards near Besancon were assigned to the French when Seventh Army responsibility for supply of the First French Army was terminated.

The disposition of Seventh Army forces dictated that Epinal should be the main supply center. Rail lines into that area were developed to carry the bulk of army supplies. Rail deliveries into Epinal were adequate by the third week of October with tonnage moving from the Marseille port through Dijon and the classification yards of Langres to Epinal, a distance of more than 500 miles. Shipments were irregular, however; and eight to twelve days were required for a turn-around of the freight cars. Tonnage deliveries were built up to 5,000 tons by the third week of October, and additional main supply points were established by the army.

The turn-around time of rolling stock on the long haul with limited equipment available turned attention to the dangers of bottleneck delays, as the flow of supplies was even then barely sufficient to meet army needs. As the time for the round-trip increased, COMZONE contended that the army was consuming too much time in unloading the freight cars. Investigation developed, however, that the delay was not the fault of the Seventh Army, which had a small number of cars under load in the army area. There was a far greater number of cars on sidings in the Communications Zone. Avoidance of car diversions in the COMZONE and careful regulation by CONAD was suggested as the solution to the problem.

Epinal marked the forward railhead until 15 November, when completion of the bridge over the Moselle River at Langley made it possible to extend the line an additional 30 miles to Luneville, including, to a limited extent, the use of the nearby towns of Charmes and Bayon. The rapid advance of its armies made it necessary for Sixth Army Group

to request SOLOC to have CONAD assume the responsibility for the movement of supplies to new army dumps well forward. It was proposed to move the rear boundary of the combat zone well forward and give top priority to the rehabilitation of railroads in forward areas.

Forward reconnaissance continued after the railhead was established at Luneville. Forward facilities at Avricourt, Sarrebourg, and Reding were investigated. The completion of a canal bridge near Heming on 5 December made it possible to open the rail line to Reding several miles beyond Sarrebourg, where railheads were established. The nearby La Forge bulk-storage plant, became the unloading point for tank cars.

A new system of requisitioning transportation tonnage was put into effect on 2 December by SOLOC. Seventh Army G-4 submitted requisitions for a 10 day period to the Base Section, which estimated tonnage requirements and entered a bid for allocations necessary to move the volume. It was still necessary for Seventh Army to request allocations of tonnage on the railroad to move special supplies and equipment that would not normally be covered by a periodic requisition, such as Bailey bridging, timber, and fortification materials. Daily receipts of all classes of supply averaged approximately 3,200 long tons per day by 2 December, slightly below the minimum requirements for the army. Supply reserves were thus depleted.

Base Section had taken over some army supply installations in the Epinal-Luneville area. Since the Seventh Army had as yet insufficient rail facilities in the Saverne area, it became necessary to unload many of the supplies requisitioned by army in Base Section installations to the rear. There was a period of transition in the moving of major army depots during which the army supply services were, in effect, requisitioning supplies that would be shipped and received by the Base Section. All requisitions at this time by the army represented supplies for current requirements and would be re-routed forward to Sarrebourg and Saverne as rapidly as the rail and truck facilities permitted. The Arzviller tunnel between Reding and Saverne was holding up the extension of rail lines. A Class I dump at Lixheim, north of Re-

ding, was opened in the middle of December with the completion of track repairs on a small spur line. On the other side of the tunnel the line from Saverne to Haguenau was operational, although the Haguenau yard was badly damaged and a by-pass necessary north to Wissembourg. In Strasbourg 50 serviceable locomotives and considerable rolling stock were captured, alleviating the shortage of locomotives considerably. The rail yards in the Sarrebourg area were capable of handling 3,500 to 4,000 tons daily.

Opening of the Arzviller tunnel on 21 December extended the rail service to Schweighausen. Forward railheads were opened at Hochfelden for ammunition, Saverne for signal supplies, Brumath and Schweighausen for fuel, and Neubourg for engineer property. The line to Molsheim and Haguenau could handle approximately 2,000 long tons per day to either place, which was adequate at that time to carry all Seventh Army supplies consigned to that area. The arrival of additional troops in the Seventh Army in the third week of December and limited receipts from the Base Section resulted in a reduction in army supply reserves. On 23 December 64,883 tons of supply were on hand, divided with approximately two-thirds in the Epinal-Luneville area and one-third in forward army supply installations.

As the tactical situation required the Seventh Army to assume part of the Third Army's right flank positions, it was agreed with Third Army that tonnage for the Seventh Army might be routed via Neufchateau-Toul to railheads on the line from Chateau-Salins to Sarralbe, Hampont, Haboudange, and Insming. A capacity of approximately 3,000 long tons was made available to the Seventh Army to carry supplies to the XV Corps area on the Third Army right flank.

An unexpected interruption in the flow of supplies occurred on 25 December when Seventh Army Quartermaster was advised that Delta Base would require a two-day suspension of supplies. A shortage of rail cars made it necessary for the army to be supplied directly from the stocks of CONAD during the period. By the end of December the rail line was operational up to Soultz, although no forward railheads were established beyond Schweighausen. Actual tonnage was delivered to Seventh Army railheads by a combination of truck and rail during

October, but during November and December the rail lines transported essential supplies needed for operations.

Bulk movement of supplies over the highways continued during the early part of October, as rail lines were being pushed forward to the dump area in and around Vesoul. Addition of the XV Corps' 50,000 troops to the Seventh Army intensified the task of supply and the effort to build up reserves. The heavy strain placed on motor transportation was met in part by the quality of American equipment, which withstood rigorous, continuous, 1,000 mile round trips to the beach, and in part to the phasing in of mobile supply of major ordnance items and spare parts soon after the southern France assault convoys. Utilization of the replacement reserve of motor transport necessitated the employment of as much as one-half of depot personnel to substitute as truck drivers.

The "Flaming Bomb Express" operated by army ordnance units during the critical transportation period was discontinued on 8 October 1944. The discontinuance of all truck convoys to the ports of Marseille and Toulon, however, was not effected until early November. By mid-October improvement of the rail situation alleviated the problem of transporting full-tracked vehicles, which could not economically move overland under their own power for the long distance required from the beaches to the combat area. Motor truck-trailers had been employed until rail transport was provided.

Truck transportation in early October centered at St. Loup, between the railhead at Vesoul and Seventh Army Headquarters at Epinal. It was the responsibility of trucking units to transfer supplies from rail unloading points and move them forward to depots and dumps. Separate dispatch teams were organized to control army trucks at these points. As rail facilities were extended to the Epinal region, dispatch teams moved forward to the new dumps and army supply points near Epinal.

Although long convoys had largely been discontinued by this time, one additional convoy of 220 trucks was organized on 24 October and was dispatched to Cherbourg, a distance of some 300 miles, to bring 2,500 replacements to the Seventh Army. During the absence of this

equipment, three new divisions earmarked for the Seventh Army arrived at Marseille. It was necessary to borrow the organic equipment of XV and VI Corps to transport them to the army area.

Plans for a retrograde movement were prepared late in December in accordance with an Army G-2 report that an enemy drive similar to that in the Ardennes sector was expected in the area between Ingwiller Gap and Sarrebourg. The Colmar area was threatened by attack in a possible enemy effort to cut off Strasbourg. To meet such a situation, plans were made to evacuate all troops east of the Vosges Mountains. Six parallel highway networks were to be used for the movement.

The most serious problem that beset the ordnance maintenance section was the lack of parts that made it necessary to deadline vehicles until they could be secured by special shipment. The rapid use of rolling equipment had made it impossible to build up any reserve of spare parts and major assemblies. In some instances, organizations, particularly armored units, newly arrived from the States, had lost some of their organizational equipment, including specialized tank repair tools, since the material had been loaded on a different ship from that carrying the unit.

The receipt of major replacement items was insufficient as late as 25 November, which resulted in the issue of practically all reserve vehicles and an increase in the number of deadlined vehicles. One of the most critically short supplies was truck tires. So acute was the shortage that a shipment from Base Section on 25 November of 3,000 tires for one-quarter ton trucks was classed as only temporary relief of this item. During the campaign in November army ordnance reports indicated that the demands for major replacement items were high and that reserves of most combat vehicles were completely exhausted. At the request of Sixth Army Group to SOLOC, it was suggested that the shop facilities of ETOUSA be called upon to make repairs on the large number of cargo vehicles of Seventh Army deadlined for lack of parts. The ordnance base shop at Dijon was made available to Seventh Army to handle some third and fourth echelon maintenance.

Special Support Problems

In the Vosges campaign the services of supply faced and solved several special problems in the support of infantry troops. Rugged terrain and winter weather added to the difficulties of getting supplies to the front line soldier. Adequate communications were maintained only by the full and complementary employment of several methods. At times, when German counterattacks had temporarily isolated units on the line, it was necessary to resort to improvisation in re-supply.

On 2 October the VI Corps Commander had requested that the two pack trains held in Italy for the Seventh Army be shipped to France and upon arrival be attached to the VI Corps. On 23 November the 513th Pack Quartermaster Company was assigned to VI Corps for operations. The company included 300 animals and a veterinary detachment. The animals were requisitioned for use in operations in the Vosges Mountains. Although transported over a long distance by ship and train, they arrived in the corps area in satisfactory condition and were held in the Saverne area in reserve.

The mule trains were divided between the 45th and 103rd Infantry Divisions. An account from the 157th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Division provides the picture of how the animals were employed:

With the companies pushing forward over mountainous terrain inaccessible to vehicles, the regiment for the third time in its combat history began utilization of pack mules, which each night hauled supplies to the troops while under the cover of darkness. Regular army mules handled by experienced negro mule skimmers made up the pack trains, a far cry from those employed by the regiment in Sicily and Italy where all and any available animals were used for supply and "skimmers" were drawn from the line companies.

Forage for the mules was difficult, as there were no adequate facilities for feeding or watering the animals near the front. Most of the supplies carried by the animals were rations and ammunition for infantry rifle or heavy weapons companies. The fact that most of the packing was done at night to escape enemy observation made it necessary that experienced men be used. Little or no difficulty was

experienced with mines or trip wires, as mule trains carried supplies forward.

Aerial re-supply was necessary in one instance during the winter campaign to subsist and provide ammunition for troops which were isolated, although air transport was employed on other occasions to supplement surface transportation. Air supply of .30 caliber ammunition in early October had relieved a critical shortage in the ammunition supply point at Brote. Airborne troops had relied upon this source for supply during an initial phase of the invasion. On 26 October, however, the first call of the army was made on air transport to re-supply part of a battalion which had been isolated by the enemy.

Elements of the 1st Battalion of the 141st Infantry Regiment near La Houssiere had been out of contact for four days when the 36th Infantry Division called for aerial re-supply. The enemy had cut supply routes. All attempts to establish a line of communication had failed, with the exception of a relatively few rounds of type D rations (chocolate bars) which had been fired into the area by the 131st Field Artillery. Intermittent radio contact was maintained.

Air transport troops met some difficulties in the re-supply endeavor. The first drop was attempted at 1100 hours on 27 October by four planes of the 371st Fighter Bomber Group but was unsuccessful. Bad weather hindered the flight and resulted in the loss of one plane. Weather was still poor on 28 October but after several unsuccessful attempts four planes succeeded in dropping rations and radio batteries within reach of the troops. In the early part of the afternoon one plane was shot down by friendly anti-aircraft fire. The weather on the morning of 29 October had improved considerably, and 15 planes dropped their packets of supply in the battalion area. This drop supplied troops with 155 cases of K rations; 3 medical units including plasma; 1 day supply of .30 caliber, .45 caliber, and carbine ammunition; 50 gallons of water; and one unit of radio batteries. Later the same day four P-47s landed seven packets containing ammunition in the battalion area.

Contact was made with the isolated group shortly after this last drop by the aircraft, and certain facts became available regarding

the success of the supply effort. Air drops were received in satisfactory condition, but in retrieving the supplies the men were subjected to enemy fire and disclosed their own positions. A message was received via radio from the isolated battalion the day before the 442nd Regimental Combat Team succeeded in breaking through to their positions: "Have supplies for three days. No Halazone. Low on ammunition. How do you treat trenchfoot. Please drop socks, foot powder and Halazone"

Enemy anti-aircraft fire and extremely poor weather over the target, revealed by an air photo showing 10/10 clouds over the drop area, made the flying of this mission hazardous. Of flights scheduled for three consecutive days, only one flight was carried through with sufficient visibility. A drop made over the target area by instrument flying was apparently unsuccessful, since the unit was unable to locate the supplies. On 16 November, when information was received that the 1st Battalion of the 399th Infantry, 100th Division, had been separated from other elements of the unit by enemy action, a new mission for aerial re-supply was originated. All preliminaries had been completed for an attempted drop to this battalion, when contact was reestablished with the regiment.

The Signal Corps met its problems during the fighting in the Vosges by using all available methods of communications. Radio, which had been depended on to such a great extent during the advance through southern France, was largely replaced by wire communications. At army and corps levels radio was used chiefly as an emergency means of communications during October. However, artillery, engineer, tank-destroyer, and infantry units constantly requested additional radios. Teletype service now began to carry the large bulk of army messages. The addition of elements of three new divisions to the Seventh Army in December seriously threatened the efficiency of army communications. The army signal officer stated that "close cooperation of Corps and Division Signal Officers, the employment of the divisions as separate regiments, and good fortune tactically averted serious signal complications." The new units arrived without division signal companies making it necessary to stretch previously committed signal units. Field wire was critically short during this period, requiring a system of rationing instituted on 18 November.

With the advent of winter came particular problems for supporting arms and services. Weather forced rapid adaptability in the use of equipment. It became necessary, for example, to winterize the water cooling systems of all vehicles. These supplies had been excluded from phased requisitions for the first 60 days in order to meet the limited tonnage available for ordnance Class II and Class IV supplies. Anti-freeze was first ordered by radio as early as 4 September for an emergency air shipment to the 1st Airborne Task Force. Other shipments were expected, but the supply of anti-freeze to the army was insufficient until 30 November.

Other supporting units, in addition to ordnance, were affected by wet, winter weather. Soggy ground required the use of a steel landing mat for air artillery observation planes. The lack of these mats in the first part of November threatened to curtail air liaison observation for the field artillery in forward areas. All traffic, ground as well as air, was affected by increasing snowfall in the Vosges Mountains. The ordnance section of Seventh Army found it necessary to issue administrative instructions on the employment of safe driving methods.

At the direction of Sixth Army Group, SOLOC initiated a study of the overall situation of winter operation in relation to the proper grades of fuel, lubricant, and grease necessary to meet winter driving conditions. A moderation in the weather toward the latter part of November limited the immediate need for winter lubricants, which was very fortunate since none of the winter grades had been made available from Base Section. As a result of the SOLOC survey an estimated 210,000 gallons of winter-grade lubricants would be needed for the period 20 November to 20 December. The shipment of the required lubricants began on 30 November. Units operating under conditions of extreme cold at a time when no winter grade lubricants were available were furnished conversion figures for blending available greases with a percentage of V-80 gasoline to serve until winter supplies were received. It was anticipated that this type of operation would cause an increase in the depreciation of starting batteries and motors and would result in increased maintenance of engines, transmissions, and differentials.

The engineers reported trouble with the T6E1 mines; they were finding ice and dirt in the fuze cavity. The fuze would not seat properly; and, when the cap was screwed back on, the mine would detonate. To rectify the trouble engineer personnel inspected all of this type of mine in the army supply points, cleaning all fuzes and storing them in a face down position. This additional service prevented future trouble.

Winter fighting through mountainous terrain exacted a heavy toll of material, the replacement of which was difficult, sometimes next to impossible. Losses of armored vehicles and tanks posed problems during the latter portion of the period, as casualties exceeded available reserves. From D-Day through December losses were recorded of 213 medium tanks, 63 light tanks, and 158 armored vehicles, including half-tracks. Army sources were overextended to replace them. In early December the Seventh Army G-4 recommended that replacements for the 2nd French Armored Division be furnished through CONAD and advised that losses of the American 14th Armored Division alone would absorb all reserves if replaced completely. Concurrently, the 15-day reserve of combat vehicles was insufficient to replace losses; and army requested SOLOC for an increased special reserve. Vehicles due out to fill losses generally reflected an upward trend; and by the end of the year units of the army were short 25 light armored cars, M8; 15 3 inch gun motor carriages, M10; three 90mm gun motor carriages, M36; 53 medium tanks, M4, with 75 or 76mm gun; 26 medium tanks, M4 series, with 105mm howitzer; and 72 utility armored vehicles, T41. Replacement of armored combat vehicles was one of the principal problems of supply.

Substantial losses were incurred in passenger and cargo transportation vehicles, including 302 6×6 trucks and 627 one-quarter ton passenger trucks. Unreplaced losses at the end of the year amounted to 115 one-quarter ton trucks, 305 one and one-half ton cargo trucks, and 221 two and one-half ton trucks. Ordnance continued to find maintenance and replacement of passenger and cargo vehicles a serious problem.

Losses in small arms weapons by the end of the year had resulted in a critical shortage of only one type, the .30 caliber machine

gun, of which 327 were due out with none on hand in army stock. The loss of 278 machine guns of .50 caliber since D-Day had been replaced. Also replaced were 1,824 caliber .45 submachine guns, 2,684 caliber .45 pistols, 4,701 carbines, 585 caliber .30 automatic rifles, and 3,949 caliber .30 M1 rifles.

Losses of artillery pieces, while not great in quantity, were felt keenly because the number of weapons in action was never considered adequate. Replacements were made during the period, so that at the end of the year there was no shortage. Army ordnance had replaced four 155mm guns, ten 105mm howitzers, eleven 155mm howitzers, and five 75mm pack howitzers. In the meantime, the army had destroyed substantially greater numbers of comparable pieces of enemy equipment. In captured material which was serviceable and ready for use when ammunition could be acquired, the army had eight 88mm guns, a half-track vehicle mounting a 75mm gun, and two other 75mm guns. Captured material was channeled by the unit which captured it through army to Base Section for use in equipping the French Forces of the Interior or recruits for the expanding French Army. There were some instances, however, in which American troops used enemy equipment against its makers, such as the automatic 20mm and 88mm dual purpose gun to furnish anti-aircraft protection to advanced landing strips for artillery liaison planes.

Material captured from the retreating enemy in the Vosges was relatively small in quantity, although the seizure of Strasbourg uncovered substantial stores, the handling of which taxed army facilities. Some supplies were found in warehouses and arsenals in the Saverne-Strasbourg-Haguenau area, but many of them possessed little or no military value. Construction supplies captured in German engineer dumps at Obernai and Russ, however, were used to a maximum extent by the army, as were the few serviceable motor transports obtained from time to time.

Supply and the Individual Soldier

The advent of cold and inclement weather with the approach of winter imposed additional supply difficulties on a system already

under the strain of meeting current demands for ammunition, fuel, and rations. The needs of the soldier in the foxhole for adequate protection against the winter focused the attention of supply services on the procurement of individual clothing and equipment.

Although the army quartermaster had phased in supply and maintenance of winter clothing for the troops who had come ashore with the lightest possible combat packs, shipments of clothing and other quartermaster Class II items had been curtailed while gasoline and rations had been given higher priority to support the army during its first month of operations. The sudden approach of wet and cold weather prompted the army G-4 on 12 September to order all units arriving over the beaches to unload organic equipment and haul one load of supplies to forward army dumps, returning to bring their own equipment forward. Of the tonnage thus made available, the quartermaster was allocated 50 percent, of which 40 percent was given over to clothing, blankets, and other Class II items. Expedited movement of winter supplies thus enabled the quartermaster to make an initial issue of woolen underwear on 23 September.

Addition of the XV Corps and supporting troops added to the problem of supplying winter clothing and equipment. During the planning phase of the operation the army quartermaster had requisitioned Class II items based on the DRAGOON troop list and the then anticipated expansion of the army. At the time of the actual receipt of these supplies the army troop strength had so increased that 100 percent issue would be impossible until subsequently requisitioned stocks had been received. Under these conditions the quartermaster determined that issues could be made on a basis of 75 percent of command strength with a priority established to assure that combat troops would be the first to receive winter clothing. Upon combat unit commanders was imposed the responsibility of determining which 25 percent of their command could best operate, based on the nature of their duties, without special winter clothing during the interim.

A trickle of issues during the early part of October developed into a larger volume which, before the end of the month, had provided an overcoat, two sets of woolen underwear, an additional blanket, and

a pair of woolen gloves per man in combat units. Along with a pair of shoe pacs and three pairs of ski socks, some other items of special winter equipment were made available for the front line infantryman. Late in the month initial issues were made of a new field jacket with high neck sweater to be worn underneath the jacket.

Toward the goal of providing a complete issue to all troops the Seventh Army Quartermaster continued distribution during November on a percentage basis of field jackets and sweaters, shoe pacs or overshoes, sleeping bags with cases, and combat jackets and trousers for the armored elements. By the end of the month the army G-4 reported that divisions had received a full issue of sleeping bags and winter clothing, together with 97 percent of their requirements for shoepacs or arctic overshoes. Issues continued as stocks were made available. In late December the army issued to each of its seven operating divisions 4,000 mountain type sleeping bags, designed for protection against much lower temperatures than the wool bag. To each of five divisions were issued 3,700 pile liners for the field jacket, a warmer item than the sweater. Some issues had already been made of hoods for field jackets and the new style field trousers, which were to be worn over wool trousers. But the slowness of receipts of some special items of winter equipment had delayed issue to troops needing them, resulting in some instances of combat elements being subjected unnecessarily to adverse winter weather without the fullest protection that would have been provided. While maintenance of items introduced as standard issue was satisfactory, there was an apparent delay in introduction of an item for initial use.

Combat troops were sleeping on wet ground in clothes that were soaked with mud. The army quartermaster could provide an original issue of winter clothing; but he could not provide a means for drying it once it became soaked, unless the divisions could pull their combat units back long enough to issue a complete change. The wet, dirty clothes then could be turned in, laundered, and held for the next unit that came back. In this way a small surplus was made to cover a large number of troops.

New issues of winter clothing alleviated to some extent the

discomforts of the soldier in the line. Overcoats issued to combat troops, however, proved to be too bulky for men at the front. Sleeping bags were accepted with varying degrees of enthusiasm; the main complaint was that it was impossible to keep them clean and difficult to get in and out of the bag. As of 24 December a shortage of shelterhalf tents and raincoats became apparent. This was serious since all army service and combat troops were subject to sleeping in the open and on the ground, during which time the shelterhalf was used to keep the bed-roll or blankets clean as well as to provide insulation between the body and the wet ground.

Whenever possible, a provision was made for the use of stoves. The oil burner for use in tents was issued first to hospitals, which were equipped completely by 1 December. As early as October the demand for all types of fuels for heating purposes had increased with rainy weather and the approach of winter. Units in the field had purchased stoves from civilian sources and improvised others. It was originally planned to issue divisions one pound of coal per man per day, but insufficient quantities were available and this basis was soon changed. Units conserved all combustible materials from waste piles for use as fuel, such as ammunition crates; but sufficient amounts were not available to meet the demand and it was necessary to obtain wood from local sources many times during the month. This was especially necessary to continue in operation shower units, sterilization and bath units, and other personnel health centers. No coal was procured from local sources because of restrictions against purchase or the taking of coal from civilians.

In November the Conservateur de Forets of the French Government directed the release of 9,500 cubic meters of wood to the Seventh Army. Further exploitation of wood supply was made in the Neufchateau area, which yielded 270 truck loads of wood by 28 November. Coal was supplied by CONAD at the rate of 300 tons per day, permitting an increase in the coal allowance to two pounds per man per day in addition to the wood ration. Reconnaissance made of the availability of coal in all forward areas located 40,000 tons near Strasbourg and 600 tons in Bischwiller during the first half of December, but

much of this fuel was needed by local civilian industries which were employed in the manufacture of sand bags for army use. The majority of coal mines in the area had been flooded beyond immediate rehabilitation, while others were without rail service making a potential source available but not taking care of immediate needs.

As the campaign in Alsace continued through the months of November and December, combat troops were fighting the elements as much as the enemy. Snowfalls and freezing temperatures alternated with thaws and rain. The air was cold and raw. Soldiers of the Seventh Army made the best of a difficult situation, getting their food and warmth and sleep wherever they could find them. The service of supply worked to provide minimum comforts for the soldier and to keep essential military supplies at the front. Throughout the period the Seventh Army had to hold as a primary purpose the building up of reserves for a coming offensive against Germany.

CHAPTER XXII

The Last German Offensive

The German army struck in the closing hours of the old year with fanatical force. The 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division spearheaded one attack group, its initial objective being the town of Rohrbach in the



LOOKING SOUTH FROM BITCHE

" . . . The enemy struck southward from the Bitche area in the low Vosges Mountains . . . "

eastern Sarre Valley. It was supported by two other divisions, the 19th Infantry Division and 36th Volks Grenadier Divisions on its right. The

559th, 361st, and 256th Volks Grenadier Divisions comprised another attack group and struck southward from the Bitche area in the Low Vosges Mountains.

Before recounting the German attack in detail, it is perhaps appropriate to recapitulate briefly the situation on Seventh Army's front and to sum up what has been learned subsequently, from captured documents and other sources, of actual German battle plans. It has already been stated that on 29 December Seventh Army G-2 estimated that the Germans would launch a series of limited objective attacks for the purpose of keeping Seventh Army under sufficient pressure to prevent it from sending troops north against the Ardennes salient, or, as the next probability, that they would attack south from the Bitche-Sarreguemines area with from five to eight divisions to seize the Saverne and Ingwiller passes, to fan out to destroy the Seventh Army in the Rhine Valley, and to recapture Alsace. Such a drive, it had been foreseen, might well be coordinated with a drive northward from the Colmar bridgehead and the establishment of a Rhine bridgehead in the Gamsheim area. The Seventh Army preparations for defense had been intensified accordingly. During the early part of the last ten days of December VI Corps had begun to prepare an alternate main line of resistance along the Maginot Line. Both VI Corps and XV Corps had been preparing counterattacks against possible enemy penetrations as well as consolidating lines of defense.

During the last two days of the month these preparations were completed. A radio message from Sixth Army Group received on 30 December warned

that a hostile attack against your flank west of Bitche may force you to give ground from your main position. To meet such a possibility, it is necessary that your west flank be protected by a reserve battle position. With this in mind, reconnaissance and organization of a reserve battle position will be instituted without delay along high ground on the general line: Hill east of Landroff — Benestroff — Sarre-Union — Ingwiller. One half of each division and attached troops currently earmarked as SHAEF reserve, located in your area, may be employed at any given period of time to assist in organization of ground provided that troops so employed can be reassembled and prepared for movement on six hours' notice.

These directives were carried out by New Year's Eve. XV Corps prepared its secondary main line of resistance with its western part in the Maginot Line. The SHAEF earmarked units, the 36th Division and the 12th Armored Division, plus the 2nd French Armored Division upon its arrival in the Seventh Army area were ordered to be ready to counter-attack against enemy penetrations.

Both corps planned to defend on their forward lines until ordered to withdraw and then to fight delaying actions to the secondary line. The 14th Armored Division in VI Corps reserve was ordered to move to the vicinity of Phalsbourg and to prepare to counterattack to the northwest in the XV Corps sector, or to the southeast toward Selestat. On the Seventh Army's left flank Third Army was "limiting the enemy offensive and . . . preparing to counterattack." On the right the French First Army contained the Colmar Pocket and prepared defensive positions in depth.

On New Year's Eve General Patch visited the XV Corps command post at Fenetrange and there warned both the XV Corps and the VI Corps Commanding Generals that an enemy attack was to be expected during the early hours of New Year's Day. Official holiday celebrations were cancelled. Preparations had already been made to move the Seventh Army command post from Saverne to Luneville, a more central position for the direction of both XV and VI Corps defense. This move was completed on 2 January, after the Germans had launched their initial assault.

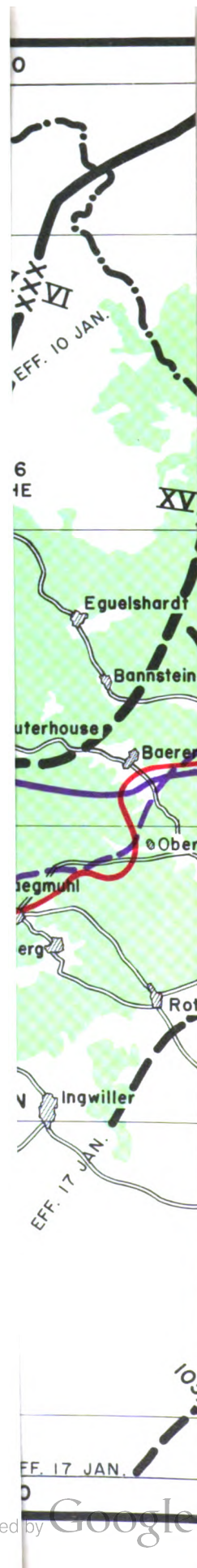
The German Plan

German documents subsequently captured revealed that the German High Command West apparently had concluded from Allied withdrawal of bridgeheads in the Sarre area that forces on this front south from the Ardennes to the Rhine had been weakened. On 21 December German Army Group G was directed to exploit this situation, specifically through local attacks and preparations for a surprise attack to regain the Saverne Gap. Signal operations instructions issued on 25 December designated the new operation by the code word *Nordwind*.

The objective of the operation was to gain the Saverne Gap in the Phalsbourg-Saverne sector in order to annihilate Seventh Army forces in northern Alsace and to secure a juncture with the German Nineteenth Army. For this purpose two attack groups were to be readied. The first group was to attack from east of the Blies River toward the south in order to breach the Maginot Line at Rohrbach and there to make a junction with the right flank of the second group for a thrust against Phalsbourg. The second group was to attack from east of Bitche toward the south in several spearheads and then to link up with the first group, after which, depending on the situation, both were to attack either east or west or south toward the Phalsbourg-Saverne line.

On 26 December German High Command West informed Army Group G of the Fuehrer's request that the efforts of the right attack group be undertaken in such a way that with cover for its right flank against the Sarre River and with cover for its left flank against Saverne it could quickly reach the highway leading to the Phalsbourg-Saverne axis. Therefore it was necessary to move the right flank of the XIII SS Army Corps westward to Bliesbruck on the Blies River. From there the attack of Group I could be launched south by way of Woelfling, thence southeast to Rohrbach and the road net south of Rohrbach. The 25th Panzer Grenadier Division and the 21st Panzer Division were designated as reserves. They were to be so situated in the northern area that after the breakthrough they could be shoved rapidly south past Group I, then theoretically at Rohrbach.

As early as 22 December it was proposed to support the operations of Army Group G by employing special forces east of the Rhine which had been brought together under Army Group Oberrhein. The commander of this army group was instructed to support Operation *Nordwind* by shocktroop tactics and to assist in the establishment of bridgeheads north and south of Strasbourg. By 26 December it was decided that the attack over the upper Rhine was not to begin until 48 hours after the initial assault. At the same time a diversionary attack to the north on the Third Army front was called off. On the next day more detailed plans revealed that the Oberrhein command was to be committed only when the armored spearheads of the assault forces



driving south from Bitche had arrived at the eastern exits of the Vosges in the Ingwiller-Saverne area. After having established its bridgehead across the Rhine north of Strasbourg the Oberrhein Army Group was to aid in the destruction of Seventh Army troops isolated in Alsace by attempting a juncture with Groups I and II which would be turning east from the Vosges Mountains to the Haguenau-Brumath area. The Fuehrer ordered the initial attack for operation *Nordwind* to start at 2300 hours on 31 December 1944.

The Initial Blows

On 31 December Seventh Army occupied an 84 mile front from the Rhine to a point a few miles west of Saarbruecken and a flank along the Rhine north and south of Strasbourg. VI Corps held positions on the right from the Rhine River to Bitche with the 79th and 45th Infantry Divisions in the line and the 14th Armored Division less one combat command in reserve. On the VI Corps left flank, holding a front of about ten miles in the Low Vosges, was Task Force Hudelson. On the left flank of Task Force Hudelson XV Corps maintained a line west to within a few miles of Saarbruecken employing the 100th, 44th, and 103rd Infantry Divisions with the 106th Cavalry Group on the left flank. The greater part of the Rhine flank, extending for about 40 miles, was a responsibility of Task Force Herren and Task Force Linden. These task forces were composed of infantry elements of the 70th and 42nd Infantry Divisions respectively, whose supporting troops had not yet arrived in the army area.

The 44th Infantry Division of the American VI Corps deployed between Sarreguemines and Rimling bore the full impetus of the enemy's right flank drive. In the space of a few hours the entire divisional front was engaged. On the left flank between Sarreguemines and Folsper-viller the 114th Infantry Regiment with the aid of concentrated artillery fire smothered a determined enemy effort to exploit his Blies River bridgehead at the bend north of the Sarreguemines airport. In the center the enemy attempted three crossings southeast of Habkirchen without success, as the 324th Infantry Regiment held inviolate the line of the Blies River.

The enemy unleashed the full fury of his attack against the 71st Infantry Regiment which held a line extending from Bliesbruck eastward to Rimling. A five company assault north of Rimling curled



RIMLING AREA

“ . . . The enemy unleashed the full fury of his attack against the 71st Infantry Regiment which held a line extending from Bliesbruck eastward to Rimling . . . ”

about the right flank of the 2nd Battalion forcing a withdrawal of about 1,000 yards. The 3rd Battalion of the 71st Infantry moved out to help restore the overrun positions. However, three companies of the enemy had driven through the 1st Battalion on the regimental left flank and had penetrated the Bliesbrucken woods 2,000 yards to the rear of the lines. The 3rd Battalion was diverted to meet this penetration and plunged into a pitched battle in the forest. Although assisted by a reserve battalion of the 324th Infantry, troops of the 71st Regiment failed to dislodge the enemy from his positions in the woods; but they contained his penetration and reformed the line along the southern edge of the forest.

Elements of the 2nd Battalion aided by a platoon of tanks restored "their original positions" by 0600 hours on 1 January only to be dislodged again at 0730 hours. A see-saw battle raged throughout the



GROS REDERCHING

"... At the eastern edge of the forest, the line slanted southeast for over two miles to cover the northeastern approaches to Gros Rederching . . . "

day. At nightfall the right flank of the battalion rested on Maronviller farm, which was attacked and set afire in the middle of the night. This action necessitated an additional withdrawal to a north-south line one mile west of Rimling. Here the 2nd Battalion covered the readjustment of the remainder of the regiment before being placed in reserve. After dislodging or destroying isolated enemy groups behind the lines, reorganized troops established a line which ran west-east just below the Bois de Blies Brucken. At the eastern edge of the forest the line slanted southeast for over two miles to cover the northeastern approaches to Gros Rederching. The 3rd Battalion of the 253rd Infantry, which had

been one unit of the recently disbanded Task Force Harris, was attached to the 71st Infantry and sent into the line on the right; the 1st Battalion of the 71st Regiment was in the center and the 3rd Battalion on the left.

During the night of 1-2 January XV Corps had ordered the 12th Armored Division to establish and maintain a counter-reconnaissance screen west of the Sarre River and south of the Maginot Line to neutralize any infiltration of enemy armor. East of the Sarre River Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division was given a similar mission which the 2nd French Armored Division was to be prepared to take over on 2 January. This relief was completed, and French armor



MAGINOT LINE SOUTH OF GROS REDERCHING

" . . . XV Corps ordered the 12th Armored Division to establish and maintain a counter-reconnaissance screen west of the Sarre River and south of the Maginot Line . . . "

blocked the western end of the Vosges passages from Meisenthal south to Phalsbourg. The unit also prepared to counterattack either in the direction of Drulingen-Sarre-Union, or along the line Drulingen-Rahling. Armor was poised for an equalizing blow should it be required.

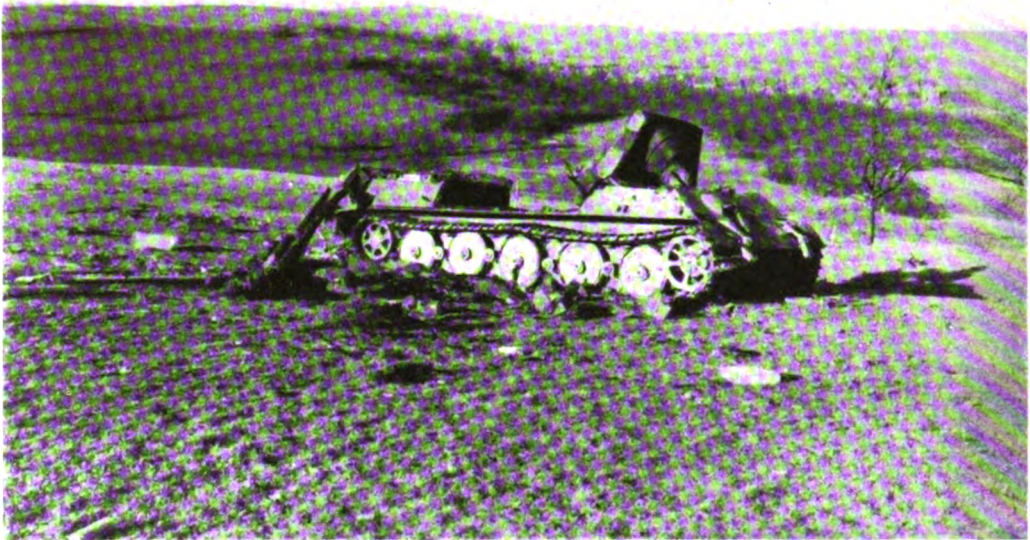
On 3 January the line of the 71st Regiment was again assailed by enemy tanks and infantry. The 2nd Battalion of the 114th Regiment, now also attached to the 71st Infantry, helped the 3rd Battalion of the 253rd Infantry to stabilize the situation after the latter unit had been pushed back a few miles. Although the 71st Infantry had been able to weld its elements into a line capable of withstanding severe enemy attack, strong enemy groups appeared behind that line. Elements of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 255th Infantry, the second regiment of Task Force Harris to be attached to XV Corps, supported by Combat Command L of the 2nd French Armored Division, were required to stop the gap and to recapture Aachen which is three miles southwest of Gros Rederching. The appearance of powerful armored reserves at this point of penetration and the severe losses that the enemy had suffered during these attacks may have been factors in the German decision at High Command level to curtail the Sarre offensive.

Remnants of the enemy in the vicinity of Aachen were eliminated on 4 January as the 2nd Battalion of the 71st Infantry made its way south toward the town, while the 2nd Battalion of the 255th Infantry cleared Aachen itself. The enemy in this sector became active again when elements of Combat Command L were driven from Gros Rederching by American tanks manned by Germans. After repelling an effort by the 2nd Battalion of the 71st Infantry to retake Gros Rederching the enemy withdrew. The Sarre pincer of Operation *Nordwind* had failed in its mission.

Drive Southeast of Bitche

Caught between the Sarre drive of German attack Group I and the drive near Bitche of German attack Group II was the 100th Infantry Division, holding the line on New Year's Eve between Rimling and Bitche. The initial German onslaught had swirled about both flanks of the division. A successful prosecution of the enemy plan would have cut the division off. As the situation developed, the 397th Infantry on the left flank was obliged to fight hard to hold Rimling against the assault of Group I. The division's right flank was exposed when the 117th

Reconnaissance Squadron of Task Force Hudelson was forced back to the line Lemberg-Mouterhouse by the attack of Group II. The 399th Infantry Regiment then had to retire from the high ground south of



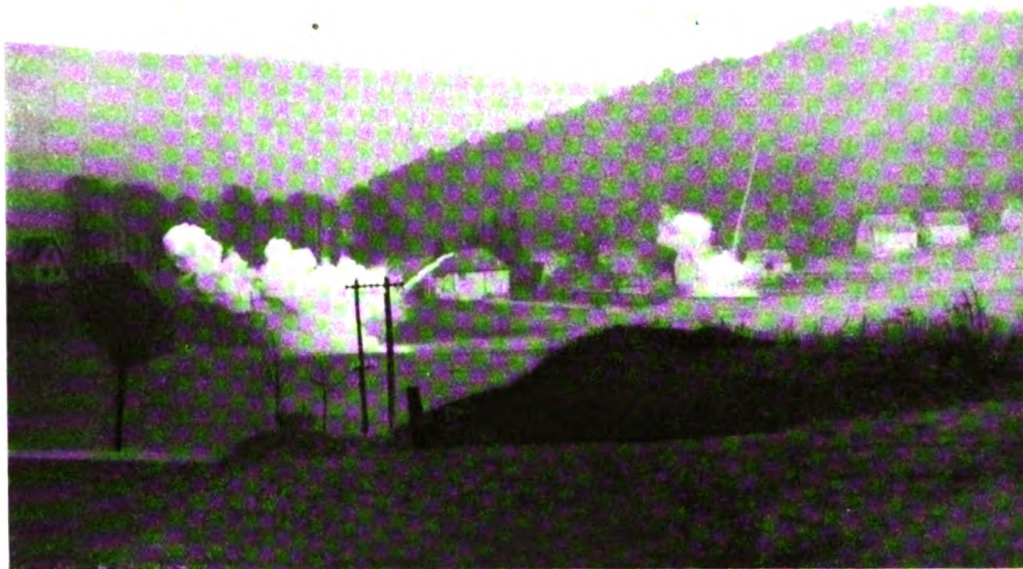
KNOCKED OUT GERMAN TANK IN RIMLING AREA

"... the 397th Infantry on the left flank was obliged to fight hard to hold Rimling against the assault of Group I . . ."

Bitche which compelled the divisional right flank to bend southward to guard against the enemy threat from the east.

Since this movement greatly extended the flank, the 3rd Battalion of the 255th Infantry was put in to bolster the line. At the end of 1 January the 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division relieved the 399th Regiment and the 3rd Battalion of the 255th Regiment from responsibility for the southern end of the flank and took positions on the line Sarreinsberg-Goetzenbruck-Lemberg. The 100th Division had been forced to form what was in effect a "second front" south to Sarreinsberg at a right angle with the original divisional front which extended from Rimling to the vicinity of Bitche.

The enemy maintained a constant pressure expressed by countless probing attacks along the "new" front until 5 January. However, the stubborn fighting qualities of the defenders plus the early dispatch



WHITE PHOSPHORUS SHELLS LAND ON ENEMY POSITIONS
IN EGUELSHARDT

" . . . Task Force Hudelson was holding a line extending from a point just south of Bitche east through Eguelshardt . . . "

of reinforcing elements stabilized the situation. For the remainder of the period the enemy showed little inclination to continue the attack, but reacted fiercely to attempted aggression by our troops against the upper shoulder of the Bitche salient.

On the left flank of VI Corps holding a front of about ten miles in the Low Vosges was a group of miscellaneous units known in the aggregate as Task Force Hudelson. Most important of these units were Combat Command R of the 14th Armored Division less one tank battalion, Company B of the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Company B of the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, and the 117th Cavalry Recon-

naissance Squadron. Task Force Hudelson was holding a line extending from a point just south of Bitche east through Eguelshardt and Neunhoffen with the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron on the left, the



GERMAN POSITIONS IN THE WOODS NEAR EGUELSHARDT

“ . . . Although the terrain was rugged, Task Force Hudelson’s lines were ‘paper thin’ . . . ”

94th Cavalry Squadron in the center, and 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion on the right.

As the new year began the enemy 256th and 361st Volks Grenadier Divisions moved southeast in a two pronged drive from Bitche without mortar or artillery preparation. The western column constituted the main enemy effort, though constant heavy pressure was maintained in the east and strong enemy infiltrations occurred there. Although the terrain was rugged, Task Force Hudelson’s lines were “paper thin.” In the center the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was attacked shortly after midnight, but the enemy withheld his strength until 0530 hours. Troops of the reconnaissance squadron then attempted to establish

a position along the Mouterhouse-Baerenthal road. However, they found the Mouterhouse-Baerenthal road already cut by the enemy. The American lines had been overwhelmed; the enemy was everywhere; there remained only the expedient of forming small groups to effect an escape by flight.

To the east the forward groups of the 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion withdrew to the Bannstein-Philippsbourg highway to avoid envelopment. The enemy pushed against the lines, and German armor was observed to be approaching Bannstein from the northwest. Half-tracks of the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion, joined by vehicles of the 117th and 94th Cavalry units, moved southeast toward Philippsbourg. Meanwhile, other elements of the 62nd Battalion, their front lines riddled by the enemy, retired to Bannstein where they maintained a perimeter defense until 1130 hours the following morning, 2 January. They then withdrew by infiltration southeast to Baerenthal. By this time the enemy had gained partial control of the Philippsbourg-Bannstein highway and were threatening both Philippsbourg and Baerenthal.

On the left flank of the Hudelson Task Force the bulk of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron had been hit hard and virtually surrounded at Mouterhouse. The situation here became obscure to task force and corps commanders, as communications with reconnaissance troops were maintained only with the greatest difficulty. The enemy had overrun their forward positions north of Mouterhouse in the early stages of the offensive. Withdrawal from a second defensive line under heavy enemy pressure was accomplished during 1 January. The squadron command post, which had been in Mouterhouse, was reestablished in Wingen; and by the end of the day the 117th Cavalry had drawn back to final defensive positions which were maintained. On the morning of 2 January the 179th Infantry was brought up and disposed along the line already held.

Farther east the task force employed the larger part of its reserves to relieve pressure on the right flank. The 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion had established positions which held Philippsbourg safe until the 275th Infantry of the 70th Division could be moved up to the line to assume control. After the enemy attack near Bannstein which

ultimately breached positions in this area, the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion and a medium tank company of the 25th Tank Battalion had set up, under task force orders, a perimeter defense around Baerenthal. The Task Force command post pulled back at dusk southwest to Reiperts-willer. The enemy continued to pour through; in mid-afternoon a force of perhaps 500 troops was observed two miles west of Baerenthal. Before the end of the day countermeasures were taken. A battalion of the 313th Infantry Regiment of the 79th Division had moved in north of Reiperts-willer to check advances in that zone; and a battalion of the 275th Infantry Regiment, which had been attached to the 45th Division, was placed in position southeast of Baerenthal to block that axis.

Still farther to the east the initial enemy thrust of Group II was met by troops of the 45th Division who joined Task Force Hudelson in a defense anchor at Neunhoffen. This attack was contained just west of Neunhoffen by the 157th Infantry Regiment of the 45th Division. Further attempts at infiltration in force between Philippsbourg and Obersteinbach were repulsed with heavy enemy casualties. These actions aided in delimiting what was to be known as the enemy's "Bitche Salient."

During the first few days of the new year the 45th Division was strenuously engaged in regrouping its organic forces and the numerous units which had been recently attached preparatory to taking command of the Low Vosges sector and neutralizing the enemy thrust. To minimize the effects of a possible complete collapse of the Low Vosges front Combat Command B of the 14th Armored Division established a counter-reconnaissance screen studded with roadblocks in the wooded mountain passes along the line Neuwiller-Ingwiller-Rothbach-Zins-willer-Niederbronn which extended along the eastern edge of the Low Vosges Massif.

On 2 January the 179th Infantry Regiment moved by motor to the corps left flank and established itself on a line two miles north of Wingen. On this flank the enemy succeeded in establishing a road-block on the Meisenthal-Wimmenau road which separated two battalions of the 179th Regiment. A few miles to the east the enemy pushed a two-company attack from the north along the two parallel roads leading into

Reipertswiller. The attack was stopped by elements of the 313th Regiment. Late in the day a battalion of the 314th Infantry Regiment arrived to bolster the Wildenguth-Reipertswiller line.

On the eastern shoulder of the salient of 2 January the 275th Infantry Regiment held the Baerenthal-Zinswiler and the Bannstein-Niederbronn passes. On the road southeast of Baerenthal two attacks by an estimated 200 to 300 enemy supported by armor were repelled. In the pass to the north the enemy manifested little aggressiveness, thereby enabling troops of the 275th Regiment to establish positions on the road northwest of Philippsbourg. Sarreinsberg on the west, Reipertswiller in the center, and Baerenthal-Philippsbourg on the east shoulder of the salient became the focal points of action as 2 January came to a close. Identification of elements of the 6th SS Mountain Division indicated that the enemy was investing considerable strength in his Low Vosges assault. The prompt appearance of Seventh Army reserves, however, was depriving the situation of its fluidity. The outlines of the salient had been formed and were hardening.

On 3 January the enemy made a determined effort to enlarge his Bitche salient. The counterattack of the 179th Regiment on the left flank was met head on. Heavy inconclusive fighting, in which elements of the 21st Panzer Division were identified, ensued. In the nose of the salient elements of the 361st Volks Grenadier Division attacked Reipertswiller from the north, northwest, and due west. A small group of the enemy managed to infiltrate south of the town, but in general these attacks were contained. On the eastern shoulder the 476th Panzer Grenadier Regiment overran forward positions of the 275th Regiment to reach Philippsbourg.

The enemy's incessant hammering against the walls of the salient drew the 180th and 276th Infantry Regiments to this sector. The 179th Regiment retained its positions on the left flank near Sarreinsberg. South of this point the 276th Infantry Regiment arrived to set up a security line and to clear Wingen of the estimated 200 troops who had infiltrated during the night of 3-4 January. The 276th Regiment fought its way to the outskirts of Wingen by 2130 hours on 4 January.

The 180th Infantry Regiment was pulled out of the Maginot Line in the east and moved into the Reipertswiller sector to clear the area west and southwest of the town of those enemy elements which had infiltrated through the lines. A line one mile southwest of Reipertswiller was established despite heavy resistance offered by the enemy. Shortly after this attack, and perhaps because of it, pressure decreased in this area; the 313th Infantry was able to reestablish contact with elements cut off in Wildenguth.

On the eastern shoulder of the salient the 275th Infantry re-established on 4 January the positions and communications which had been disorganized by the previous day's fighting. Philippsbourg was made secure, but an effort to extend the line northwest was stopped at the edge of the town. At the southwest end of the 275th's diagonal line fighting in the vicinity of Baerenthal was heavy but inconclusive.

The Bitche Salient Formed

On 5 January the 179th Infantry continued to exert steady pressure on the German forces in the Meisenthal-Sarreinsberg area, maintaining roadblocks and throwing back minor enemy attempts at infiltration. On the following day the 179th Regiment cleared the road to a point one mile southeast of Meisenthal in an attack synchronized with efforts by the 180th Infantry and the 313th Infantry. On 5 January the 180th Infantry had attacked north on a one mile front encountering especially heavy resistance on its right flank which neared Wildenguth. The heaviest fighting of all raged at the tip of the salient near Reipertswiller. The slight advances which had been made by the 313th Regiment on 5 January northwest of the town were off set by continued infiltration on the right flank east of Reipertswiller. On the next day the 180th Infantry assumed additional responsibility in the Wildenguth area, thereby releasing elements of the 313th Regiment to deal with the perforation of the right flank. While the right flank problem was being liquidated, elements of all three regiments continued the straight, forward, slugging assault north of Reipertswiller.

To the southeast the 276th Infantry had been handicapped in its attempt to clear Wingen, because the presence of American prisoners

in the town precluded the use of artillery. On 6 January the tenacious defense offered by the enemy was overcome; the town was cleared. This action marked the elimination of the enemy's deepest penetration in the Low Vosges.

Farther east the 2nd Battalion of the 276th Infantry assisted the coordinated attack of the 179th, 180th, and 313th Regiments by stopping up breaks in the line southeast of Reipertswiller. On 6 January this battalion cleared the town of Lichtenberg of the hostile forces which had infiltrated the previous day. On the following day, in conjunction with elements of the 313th and 274th Regiments the 2nd Battalion of the 276th Infantry continued its attack to the high, wooded ground northeast of Lichtenberg, trapped, and eliminated the remnants of an enemy battalion. All advances were painfully slow on 7 January, and the line was pushed forward only a mile north of the Wildenguth-Reipertswiller road. At last, however, it was apparent that enemy troops were on the defensive and that the force of their attack had spent itself.

On the eastern shoulder of the salient the 275th Infantry with 1st Battalion of the 274th Infantry attached continued to hold a line extending from southwest to northeast in the Dambach area. The enemy had advanced toward Philippsbourg on 5 January but turned back when attacked by planes. On the following day three enemy assaults on Philippsbourg were hurled back; the first was broken by artillery fire; the second disorganized and repulsed by a counterattack; the third was contained after several hours of fierce fighting. These attacks involved an estimated two or three companies. On 7 January hostile activity was negligible.

Before the enemy had launched his January offensive VI Corps had been warned of the impending attack and directed to make ready both defensive positions and countermeasures. This preparedness permitted an acceleration in the process of regrouping to contain the Bitche salient. The VI Corps units, trading blow for blow with the enemy, sapped the strength of the German drive. According to the impressions gained by the German Chief of Staff, who was with his troops on 6 and 7 January, the rugged terrain had imposed an extreme physical strain

upon the men who were compelled to fight without rest and live in the open. There was a visible abatement in combat strength.

On the other hand, after overcoming the initial shock VI Corps was able to increase the resistance it offered. By skillfully maneuvering shock troops through breaks in the line the American corps threatened German supply routes. One enemy commentary revealed that the situation in the Bitche salient as now constituted required new German forces if further exploitation was to be considered. However, the same terrain which hampered the development of a German breakthrough now served to protect the outlines of the salient which remained a real threat to Seventh Army troops in Alsace.

Terrain and Defense

The situation had altered considerably since the enemy had initiated his offensive. Problems of terrain from the point of view of offensive action became somewhat different problems when the Seventh Army turned to defense, although practically the same territory was involved, the Low Vosges or Hardt Mountains running northeast, and on either side the plains of northern Alsace and of the Sarre. The Low Vosges Mountains bisected the army front roughly perpendicular to the main line of resistance. Between the Vosges and the Rhine River is the Alsace Plain. From Neuf-Brisach to Strasbourg the average width of the plain is approximately 13 miles. North of Strasbourg the plain widens to about 28 miles. In the southern sector the Ill River cuts diagonally across the plain from Selestat gradually approaching the Rhine at Strasbourg. The Marne-Rhine Canal runs north from Strasbourg to near Brumath where it cuts west toward Saverne. The plain north of Strasbourg is crossed by several important rivers and tributaries running generally southeast from the Low Vosges to the Rhine, the Moder, the Eberbach, the Sauer, the Seltzbach. The road net is excellent throughout Alsace.

The main wooded areas are the Haguenau Forest and the Bien Wald, covering a total area of some 100 square miles, located north of Bischwiller and Lauterbourg respectively; their eastern edges parallel

the Rhine about four miles inland. Between the Haguenau Forest and the Low Vosges Mountains to the northwest is a six-mile wide defile with observation dominated by the abrupt rising hills of the range. The foothills of the Low Vosges graduate more gently to the west toward the Sarre River Valley, which was the third major terrain feature in the Seventh Army sector. In general the region about the Sarre Valley is open rolling country only moderately wooded, except for the heavily forested area west of Forbach. The Sarre River runs from south to north and into Germany between Sarreguemines and Saarbruecken. Bridges



AREA BETWEEN WINGEN SUR MODER AND INGWILLER

"... There are only a few good roads across the mountains . . . from Wingen Sur Moder to Ingwiller . . ."

over the Sarre were focal points of defense in the maintenance of the army's lateral communications.

Terrain, the framework of the tactical scheme, showed upon analysis a bias in favor of the enemy. Some of the less favorable implications of the Seventh Army's brilliant Strasbourg maneuver now

became evident. On the Seventh Army's northern front the Low Vosges formed a barrier ten miles wide between our troops to the east and west. There are only a few good roads across the mountains, running east from Phalsbourg to Saverne, from Wingen Sur Moder to Ingwiller, and from Bitche to Niederbronn. Control of these roads was essential to the coordinated command of troops on both sides of the Vosges. These defiles were not appropriate for the facile deployment of large numbers of troops. The rugged character of the terrain offered the enemy a temporarily secure flank for a counterattack in force if he were willing to gamble on holding the main lateral road for a limited time in an effort to split our forces and destroy them in detail. These factors, actual and potential, conferred upon the northern front an aspect of duality which complicated its maintenance.

The broad, swift, north flowing Rhine River formed a continuous right flank for the Seventh Army which was almost as long as the northern front itself. Although not in continuous physical contact with the enemy, the army on this front was vulnerable to infiltration or penetration. The swampy, twisting, wooded river bank afforded the enemy a flank of opportunity which was too long for our forces to hold solidly and which was ideal for continuous harassment by means of large and small patrol infiltration under cover of Siegfried Line fortification on the east bank of the Rhine. In the background there remained always the threat of an enemy attack in force to establish a bridgehead.

Ten miles west of the Low Vosges the Sarre River flows north, its course in general paralleling the outline of the Low Vosges Massif. In the vicinity of Sarrebourg the Sarre River is paralleled about four miles to the west by the canal Houilleres de la Sarre and a series of lakes extending north to Mittersheim. The canal and the Sarre converge on Sarralbe where they meet and follow winding course north to Sarreguemines. Between these waterways and the mountains to the east lies a rolling, lightly wooded plain from 10 to 12 miles in width which extends north from the vicinity of Sarrebourg, Phalsbourg, and the Saverne Gap for approximately 30 miles to the vicinity of Sarreguemines. The river with its parallel canal and lakes invited a sudden thrust by the enemy.

Aside from problems arising exclusively from terrain there remained in the southern part of the Alsace Plain a large enemy bridgehead in the Colmar Pocket. It was the mission of the First French Army to eliminate this pocket of resistance west of the Rhine, but at the end of December little progress had been made. A survey of the operation of the enemy replacement system indicated part of the difficulty. Over 80 percent of the 10,000 replacements which the enemy poured in against Sixth Army Group during the first half of December went to the Colmar Pocket. The lavish use of man-power in this position measured its importance to the enemy. Enough striking power might be deployed there to attack north to break through the First French Army and to create yet another front for the Seventh Army.

The prospect of offsetting these positional disadvantages by assigning a powerful reserve to Seventh Army was precluded by the Ardennes offensive. On 26 December Seventh Army was instructed to earmark for SHAEF reserve one infantry division, an armored division, and a corps headquarters. Even on 7 January, when the German offensive on the Seventh Army front was in full swing, reinforcements were allocated on a ratio of about eight for Twelfth Army Group to one for Sixth Army Group.

The initiative was now in enemy hands. Lacking the strength to be sufficiently strong everywhere on a static basis, Seventh Army found it necessary to predict and anticipate successive enemy thrusts at various points, blunting them with artillery fire, and moving its scanty reserves into positions where they could limit the area of enemy penetration.

Plans for Withdrawal

Recognition of the fundamental flaws in the Seventh Army's position inevitably led to the consideration of a planned withdrawal as a method to cope with the enemy offensive which was to come. Retreat from a potential trap in Alsace appeared to higher headquarters both feasible and desirable. On 28 December Sixth Army Group Letter of Instructions No. 7 was issued to the Commanding General, Seventh

Army, and to the Commanding General, First French Army. This letter outlined successive defensive positions and envisioned a main defense line along the eastern slopes of the Vosges.

On 2 January 1945 Operations Instructions Number 51, Headquarters Seventh Army, instructed VI Corps to complete its withdrawal to the main Vosges positions by 5 January, delaying on the following general lines: First position on the Maginot Line by daybreak 2 January, second position on the Bitche-Niederbronn-Bischwiller line on order, third position on the Bitche-Ingwiller-Strasbourg line on order, and, finally, the main Vosges position on order. This last position was to be selected so as to keep the enemy beyond medium artillery range of the Saverne and Molsheim passes. Inasmuch as the enemy penetration already achieved by 2 January endangered the projected retreat which was to be pivoted upon Bitche, the VI Corps counterattack already mentioned was ordered to restore positions in the Bitche-Niederbronn area.

Instructions concerning the withdrawal were amplified by General Jacob L. Devers, commanding Sixth Army Group, in a personal message to General Patch. He indicated that on the morning of 2 January General Eisenhower had expressed his concern lest divisions in the Haguenau area be severely handled or cut off in the event of a successful enemy penetration south towards Sarrebourg or north from the Colmar Pocket. The Supreme Commander placed particular emphasis on holding this area thinly and withdrawing the bulk of the VI Corps to the main Vosges positions. He further explained the big picture:

The Ardennes situation is not yet restored, thus making it imperative that a SHAEF reserve be available to move north at an early date. It is essential therefore that you form the local army and army group reserves with a minimum delay. Time is pressing and the necessity for these emergency measures must be realized by all concerned.

Sixth Army Group had been authorized to use the 12th Armored and 36th Infantry Divisions, currently earmarked for SHAEF, to restore any adverse situation in the XV Corps sector pending the creation of local army and army group reserves. This was to be regarded as a temporary emergency measure only, and Seventh Army was to use the 12th Armored and 36th Infantry Divisions only with the specific

authority of the army group commander. Higher headquarters had directed that Sixth Army Group have the bulk of its command on the main defense position, the Vosges line, by daybreak of 5 January and have it organized and wired in as quickly as possible, regardless of political repercussions and the evacuation of the Strasbourg area. The present front lines were to be held thinly with light, highly mobile forces only, these forces to be withdrawn under pressure. No troops were to be left between covering forces and the main position.

Main defense positions were to be organized rapidly in great depth. Covering forces were to be provided with such transportation as would enable them to withdraw rapidly in the face of strong German offensive action, destroying all crossing sites in the process. These light forces were in no sense to be considered sacrifice troops. Coordination of withdrawal was to be effected with the First French Army, with the main defense hinge between the two armies at Obernai. General Devers summarized the situation, enjoining the Seventh Army to accept the loss of Strasbourg and territory east of the Vosges rather than in any way impair its ability to release SHAEF reserve organizations, to reconstitute army and army group reserves west of the Vosges, and to preserve the integrity of its units in advance of the main position.

On the morning of 3 January letters from General Schwartz, French Military Governor at Strasbourg, and Brigadier General John S. Winn Jr., American Military Representative in the Strasbourg area, arrived at Seventh Army Headquarters. General Schwartz's letter was delivered to General Patch's quarters by a French officer courier shortly after midnight. In an impassioned plea, General Schwartz stated that the departure of Allied Forces from Alsace would result in wholesale massacre of the civilian population. Evacuation of such a large population was out of the question, as there was no motor transportation available and rail transportation was hopelessly inadequate. The letter from General Winn was in substance a report of General Schwartz's reaction.

General Devers arrived at the Seventh Army command post in Luneville on the morning of 3 January. According to the Seventh Army Diary account, "He stated that Strasbourg *would be evacuated* in the course of the above withdrawal and that the Commanding General,

Seventh Army, would pay no attention to any pressure, political or otherwise, to continue to hold Strasbourg."

Both the Commanding General and Chief of Staff of the Seventh Army called attention to the concern of the French Government expressed through General Schwartz and told General Devers that, if Strasbourg had to be held, the Maginot Line and the Rhine south from its intersection with the Maginot Line would be the logical line to hold. This line was already fortified, and lines to the rear were on terrain of indifferent defensive value. General Devers replied that orders were that Strasbourg would be abandoned.

During 1 and 2 January SHAEF desired that Sixth Army Group withdraw to main positions without regard to the defense of Strasbourg. General De Gaulle, however, wrote to General Eisenhower urging the defense of Strasbourg and as much of Alsace as possible. On 3 January instructions to Sixth Army Group were changed, and it was given the responsibility for the defense of Strasbourg.

While General Devers was still present at the army command post, he received orders from SHAEF that Strasbourg would be held. General White then again suggested the Maginot-Rhine line with organization of suitable successive lines to the rear to meet the contingency of forced withdrawal. General Devers approved this. Orders were issued instructing VI Corps to defend along the Maginot Line in its sector and to hold Strasbourg. Dambach-Bitche positions were to be restored in this sector by continuing counterattacks. XV Corps was to defend on its present positions and be prepared to launch a strong counterattack on army order against enemy penetrations southeast or south west of the Bitche area.

On 2 January VI Corps had undertaken the first of the two major withdrawals it was to execute in January, falling back to Maginot positions from the Low Vosges Mountains to the Rhine. From these positions troops in Alsace could be extricated more readily if unfavorable developments in the German Sarre Valley and Bitche drives required it. Utilizing fixed positions they could also defend more effectively against attacks from the north or from the east across the Rhine.

On 5 January an enemy battalion succeeded in establishing itself on the west bank of the Rhine in the vicinity of Gamsheim. During succeeding days it was reinforced by additional miscellaneous units which were under the control of the reconstituted 553rd Volks Grenadier Division.

The establishment of the enemy's exploratory and opportunist bridgehead in the Gamsheim area created a front which consisted of two salients: one was the German "Bitche Salient" in the Low Vosges Mountains; the other the Seventh Army salient in the Alsace Plain, its flanks threatened on the west by the enemy in the Low Vosges Mountains and on the east by the Gamsheim bridgehead.

The German Nineteenth Army was using nine divisions against the First French Army in an effort to develop the Colmar Pocket into an effective threat to Strasbourg from the south, although the enemy did not extend himself until 7 January when an attack forced the French First Army to yield ground in the sector north of Rhinau. Although the Seventh Army had frustrated enemy plans for a quick and single victory the situation remained tense. The enemy retained the initiative thereby continuing to impose upon the Seventh Army the classical problem of the defender who cannot be strong everywhere — where and how to group his striking power.

Letter of Instructions No. 8, Headquarters Sixth Army Group, dated 7 January 1945 directed Seventh Army to continue the defense and to organize a reserve battle position on the general line: Landroff-Benestroff-Sarre-Union-Ingwiller. An alternate position was also to be organized along the general line of the Moder River between Ingwiller and Haguenau. Withdrawal to these positions was only to be made in the face of strong enemy pressure. The boundary between the Seventh Army and the First French Army was moved to the north so that the French acquired responsibility for the Strasbourg area.

On 8 January a Seventh Army directive announced the regrouping of its units into the VI, XV, and XXI Corps, the last of which had recently been released from SHAEF reserve. The XXI Corps, commanded by Major General Frank W. Milburn, was to enter the line on the army left flank, taking over the command of the 103rd Division

and the 106th Cavalry Group. At 1200 hours on 13 January XXI Corps became operational on the Seventh Army front, continued the organization of defensive positions, and established liaison with the American Third Army on its left. Upon regrouping XV Corps had operational control of the 36th, 44th, and 100th Infantry Divisions, Task Force Harris less one regiment, and the 2nd French Armored Division. At the same time to VI Corps were assigned the 45th and 79th Infantry Divisions, the 12th and 14th Armored Divisions, and Task Forces Herren and Linden.

The modified groupings and boundaries strengthened the shield of the Seventh Army against the continuing threat to the Sarre Valley and the threat from the enemy's Bitche salient. At the same time it provided for the shift of the 12th Armored Division to the Alsace Plain where there appeared a need for it, as the Seventh Army salient, around Haguenau was being subjected to both a frontal attack from Wissembourg and a flank attack from the Rhine. The First French Army now relieved the Seventh Army of 16 miles along the Rhine River flank.

Another factor which enabled the Seventh Army to dispose of its strength more advantageously was the degree of control that it progressively acquired over the 12th Armored and the 36th Infantry Divisions, which had been placed in SHAEF reserve.

Examination of subsequently captured German documents reveals that as early as 3 January planning had begun for a second major operation *Zahnarzt*, in the Sarre Valley west of and in addition to the *Nordwind* attack. However, the first Sarre drive, the "Bitche Salient", and the attack of 7 January in northern Alsace had required so huge an expenditure of energy and resources that Generaloberst Blaskowitz of Army Group G on 8 January admitted that the attack had bogged down and that the Americans might regain the initiative. He recommended that all available forces be committed in an attempt to fulfill the objectives of the *Nordwind* operation, postponing the *Zahnarzt* operation.

The Sarre sector except for an enemy attack at Rimling on 8 January which gained little ground remained quiescent during the remainder of the month. Operation *Zahnarzt* never went beyond the planning phase. However, a French request on 10 January for the 2nd

French Armored Division for aid to relieve Strasbourg had to be refused. It was essential to keep some armor behind the Sarre River line. Activity flared forth in the Low Vosges around the rim of the Bitche salient, in northern Alsace above Haguenau, in the Rhine bridgehead at Gambsheim, and in the Colmar Pocket.

The Assault on the Bitche Salient

The Low Vosges campaign was largely a battle for the control of roads and passes; the bulk of the fighting occurred in essentially the



WHITE PHOSPHOROUS SHELLS BLASTING GERMANS OUT
OF REIPERTSWILLER

"... the bulk of the fighting occurred in three key areas: the Sarreinsberg-Althorn area ... the Reipertswiller area ... and the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal area ..."

same three key areas: the Sarreinsberg-Althorn area on the west flank of the salient, the Reipertswiller area at the point of the salient, and the Philippsbourg-Baerenthal area on the east shoulder of the salient.

The effort of the 179th Infantry against the western side of the salient made little headway during the first few days of the period. Elements of the 179th Regiment with the 19th Armored Infantry Battalion mopped up scattered islands of resistance in the Sarreinsberg area and cleared the vital Sarreinsberg-Wingen road. Disposal of these primary obstacles made feasible an attack on Althorn from the north and west which occurred on 10 January. Entry into the town was effected on the same day despite heavy artillery and mortar fire. On the following day Althorn was cleared of the enemy, and high ground to the south was occupied. On 12 January the 179th Infantry jumped off from the Althorn area with three battalions abreast. Troops attacked from a line extending from the road northwest out of Wildenguth to a position a few hundred yards north of Althorn. After three days of futile fighting against a stubborn enemy and over rugged terrain the attack in force was abandoned. The period 15-20 January was marked only by vigorous patrolling and a general strengthening of the line east of Althorn. On 17 January elements of the 179th Infantry still within the XV Corps boundary were relieved finally by the 36th Division. These elements were then free to aid the main body of the regiment in the execution of its mission.

On 8 January the 180th and 313th Infantry Regiments were engaged in heavy, inconclusive fighting at the tip of the salient. The two regiments maintained a line slightly north of Reipertswiller with the 180th Infantry on the left and the 313th on the right. The situation remained static until 10 January when the left column of the 313th Infantry pushed to high ground north of Saegmuhl while the right flank had advanced to high ground one mile northeast of Reipertswiller.

On 11 January the 6th SS Mountain Division unleashed a four battalion attack which pressed the 180th Infantry back to the Wildenguth-Siegmuhl road. The 313th Infantry also yielded ground. The 2nd Battalion of the 157th Infantry appeared in the center of the line to aid in a counterattack. Unremitting attack on the following day effected a partial restoration of the original situation. However, gains registered by either side in this bitter fight could be measured in terms of hundreds

of yards. The rugged terrain hindered the attack and precluded the attainment of spectacular advances.

The enemy effectively blocked the attack of the 180th Infantry during the next few days. The 1st Battalion of the 314th Regiment appeared briefly to replace the 2nd Battalion of the 157th in this sector. On 14 January the 1st Battalion of the 315th relieved the 313th Regiment in its positions to the right of the 180th Infantry. On 15 January the 180th Infantry relieved the 1st Battalion of the 314th. The period 15-20 January was marked by little activity. Pressure was maintained by employing patrols and light attacks.

The struggle for ascendancy on the eastern shoulder of the salient gave early promise of violent developments. On 8 January there was little evidence of a change in the enemy's dispositions, but intense activity in the area behind the lines suggested an enemy build-up. The 274th, 275th, and 276th Infantry Regiments, units of Task Force Herren, held the eastern side of the salient. These three regiments, the infantry elements of the 70th Division, had been moved progressively into the line on the Philippsbourg front during the first days of January. At the end of December Task Force Herren had occupied Rhine flank defenses together with Task Force Linden. During the early hours of the German counter-offensive, however, as left flank regiments of the 79th Division were attached to the 45th Division in the zone of German advances, regiments of Task Force Herren were attached to the 79th Division and brought up to the rim of the Bitche salient, leaving defense of the Rhine to Task Force Linden. By 8 January the 276th Infantry had completed its mission of maintaining a security line between Lichtenberg and Obermuhlthal and liquidating enemy who had infiltrated to the rear of this line. The 274th and 275th Regiments occupied a front farther to the northeast on both sides of Philippsbourg.

In spite of disquieting portents this sector manned by a number of regiments now under control of the 45th Division remained inactive. On 13 January preparations were initiated to effect the relief of Task Force Herren units by the 103rd Division in accordance with Seventh Army Operations Instructions. On the following day the 157th Infantry,

which had relieved the 276th Infantry in the territory between Lichtenberg and Obermuhlthal, advanced slowly over the heavily wooded ridges to reach the high ground overlooking the Reipertswiller-Obermuhlthal road. To the right the 36th Combat Engineer Regiment had relieved the 275th Infantry in the Obermuhlthal area.

While the 103rd Infantry Division assumed gradual control of the area east of Baerenthal without serious incident, the 157th Regiment engaged in eight days of bitter fighting between 14 and 21 January in a vain effort to clear the enemy out of the dense, rugged, and snow-covered forest that lies below the Mouterhouse-Baerenthal Valley. It was the mission of the entire 45th Division to attack northward to seize the ridge that overlooks this valley from the south: the 179th Infantry was to attack on the left, in the direction of Mouterhouse; the 180th was to hold in the center; the 157th with the 36th Engineer on its right flank was to attack on the division's right.

On the morning of 14 January the 157th Infantry jumped off from the Reipertswiller-Obermuhlthal road and was immediately pinned down by German artillery, nebelwerfer, and mortar fire, most of which came from the Mouterhouse-Baerenthal Valley. The 276th Infantry, being relieved by the 157th Infantry, had apparently given away its positions and the method of its relief by sending radio messages in the clear. Only one battalion of the 157th was able to make any headway. The 3rd Battalion on the left advanced about 2,000 yards, half way to its objective, and seized the two highest hills in the area. But the 180th Infantry on the left, and the 1st Battalion of the 157th on the right were unable to move up on its flanks. As soon as it had reached these hills, the 3rd Battalion was attacked frontally and threatened with encirclement by troops of the 11th Regiment of the 6th SS Mountain Division. The Battalion could not advance beyond this point, nor could any other elements of the 45th Division.

The remainder of the 157th Infantry fought to bolster the 3rd Battalion's precarious positions, hoping to extricate it from them. On 15 January the 2nd Battalion advanced on the left of the 3rd while the 1st Battalion made a similar effort on the right. The attacks made some

headway; but only two companies, C and G, managed to make contact with the 3rd Battalion. They had lost contact with the rest of their battalions and now formed part of the advanced and isolated force. The remaining units of the 157th Regiment tried for five days, from 16-20 January to reach these five companies without success. Each attack, each effort to move forward supplies to the isolated companies, was beaten back by the German mountain troops who had encircled them and established heavily armed and expertly camouflaged strongpoints along the trails to their rear. An attempt to resupply them by air had to be abandoned because of snow-filled skies. On 20 January, after the fifth attempt to reach them had failed, the 157th received orders to withdraw, and word was sent to the five companies to make a break for it.

At 1530 hours, 20 January, the rearward forces began to fire rifles and automatic weapons into the air to bewilder the Germans; and the radio from the five companies broadcast "We're coming out. Give us everything you've got." Firing continued for three minutes; smoke rounds were lobbed in to cover the break. But one hour later the radio reported that the enemy cordon could not be broken. Only two men out of the five companies got out. Only some 125 out of the original force of about 750 men remained unwounded; but they had to be abandoned, together with the wounded and the dead. By nightfall they had been engulfed by the enemy. On the following day the 157th Infantry was withdrawn from the line.

During this phase of operations the outlines of the Bitche Salient had been rigidly defined; enemy infiltration had been greatly reduced in both scale and frequency; the initiative had been wrested from the enemy. However, a stubborn German defense preserved intact the great bulk of the salient against heavy attacks by VI Corps troops. In the hands of a potentially resurgent enemy the salient remained a threat to the integrity of the Seventh Army. The 103rd Division had been substituted for the infantry regiments of the 70th Division, Task Force Herren, because on 12 January the VI Corps commander felt that American positions east of the Vosges would be much more secure if an experienced infantry division held the Philippsbourg line. General Patch concurred and the regrouping was effected.

The Army Front in January

The initial effort of the German counter-offensive against the Seventh Army in January had been launched in the early hours of New Year's Day in the Sarre Valley and south of Bitche. The Sarre Valley drive was the first to be blunted and then brought to a halt. The enemy's deepest penetration was made southeast of Bitche. During the month of January the German 36th Infantry Division had been shifted from the Sarreguemines area to the east side of the Bitche salient to add to the striking power of the 6th SS Mountain Division and the 256th Volks Grenadier Division. The enemy attempted to burst out of the nose of the salient without success. These major drives of operation *Nordwind* were countered and shattered by the smooth, rapid reshuffling of tactical reserves. On this sector of the Seventh Army front in the Sarre Valley and the Low Vosges the enemy battered himself to exhaustion. By 20 January the situation was stabilized and the threat of any enemy breakthrough reduced if not eliminated.

The enemy, however, had not confined his efforts to these areas. The Oberrhein Army Group had on 5 January established a bridgehead across the Rhine at Gambsheim. The German 553rd Division's miscellaneous battle groups met with some success in the expansion of this bridgehead, whereupon the 10th SS Panzer Division attempted to exploit the German advantage. North and northeast of Haguenau another enemy drive developed. The 21st Panzer Division was successively joined by the refitted 25th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 7th Paratroop Division, and the 47th Volks Grenadier Division to engage in sterile conflict in the Hatten-Rittershoffen area.

CHAPTER XXIII

German Attacks in the Rhine Valley

During its December offensive Seventh Army had extended its lines farthest from its base of operations in the sector of Lauterbourg, where the borders of France and Germany meet on the Rhine. In preparation for the blows of the German counter-offensive this point of the VI Corps salient was gradually withdrawn. During the month of January the VI Corps front east of the Low Vosges Mountains remained the most extended sector of the Seventh Army line. Here the army was most sensitive to successive German threats; first, the Bitche drive on the VI Corps left flank which together with an offensive from the Colmar Pocket might have closed at the Saverne Gap and pinched off all Seventh Army troops east of the Vosges; second, the establishment of a German bridgehead north of Strasbourg at the VI Corps right flank which potentially might swing arcs south around Strasbourg or north around Haguenau.

Preparations for defense on the VI Corps Rhine flank had been complicated by changes of policy in regard to the evacuation of or the defense of the city of Strasbourg. On 3 January orders were received that Strasbourg would be held. At that time it was further provided that the boundary between the Seventh Army and the First French Army would be shifted to the north and that the French would assume responsibility for the defense of the city.

At 0800 hours on 5 January Sixth Army Group informed Seventh Army and First French Army that command of the Strasbourg area was to pass to the Commanding General, First French Army, on the relief by the French of the American elements in that area. The relief was to take place by 2400 hours that day. In a message later that

day to the two armies involved, Sixth Army Group acknowledged that it would take a "tremendous effort" to accomplish the proposed shift in the time allotted. Because of the German attack, which struck early on 5 January, the French did not take control of their sector until 1915 hours on 7 January. Seventh Army units along the Rhine in the Strasbourg area were in the process of reorganization as the enemy launched his assault across the river.

The Rhine sector hit by the German bridgehead operation had since late December been the responsibility of Task Force Linden, the infantry elements of the 42nd Division, under the command of Brigadier General Henning Linden. Farther north the Rhine front was held by Task Force Herren. On 2 January the line held by Task Force Linden extended some 19 miles along the Rhine River from Plobsheim, south of Strasbourg, to Offendorf, roughly ten miles north of Strasbourg. From north to south five battalions were on the line: the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 232nd Regiment; the 3rd, 1st, and 2nd Battalions of the 222nd Regiment. The 2nd Battalion of the 232nd Infantry was off the line at Hoerdt. The 242nd Regiment was in reserve, prepared to block to the south on corps order to prevent a possible pincer movement from the south. During 2 January the 242nd was ordered to occupy the Vosges positions from Obernai to Molsheim, where it had established itself by 0700 hours on 3 January. The 222nd Infantry was ordered into reserve to take over the blocking mission of the 242nd. The defense of the Task Force Linden sector of the Rhine River front was then entirely in the hands of the 232nd Regiment, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions on line and the 1st Battalion in reserve near Souffelweyersheim.

Task Force Linden had been attached to the 79th Division on the morning of 2 January and ordered to take over the Task Force Herren sector, adjacent to it on the north, on 3 January. Accordingly, the 1st Battalion of the 232nd Infantry was spread out to relieve elements of the 274th Regiment, part of Task Force Herren, and to occupy the towns of Souffelweyersheim, Drusenheim, and Stattmatten with the focal point of battalion strength at Bischwiller. The northern boundary of the 232nd Regiment reached as far as Forstfeld, adjacent to the 314th Regiment of the 79th Division. The 1st Battalion of the 222nd Infantry

moved by motor to Hoerdt and was attached to the 232nd Regiment as its reserve. The 242nd Regiment was alerted for movement by motor on two hours' notice with 79th Division transportation. The 2nd Battalion



BISCHWILLER — GAMBSHEIM AREA

"... the 1st Battalion of the 232nd Infantry was spread out to relieve elements of the 274th Regiment ... with the focal point of battalion strength at Bischwiller ..."

of the 232nd Infantry was attached to the 222nd Infantry, and a boundary between the two regiments was re-established along the canal in Strasbourg. The task force front was then 31 miles long. The 3rd Battalion of the 222nd Infantry was at Entzheim, southwest of Strasbourg, ready for commitment on task force order. On 4 January the 242nd Regiment relieved the 314th Regiment of the 79th Division, placing its 1st and 3rd Battalions on line next to the 1st Battalion of the 232nd and facing north toward Hatten and Rittershoffen. Company G of the 232nd Infantry was relieved from its defense position on the island before Strasbourg by the 2nd Battalion of the 222nd Infantry

and moved into the Rhine Line of its parent unit in an area including the towns of Offendorf and Herrlisheim. This was the disposition of the elements of Task Force Linden when the attack came.

The Bridgehead Established

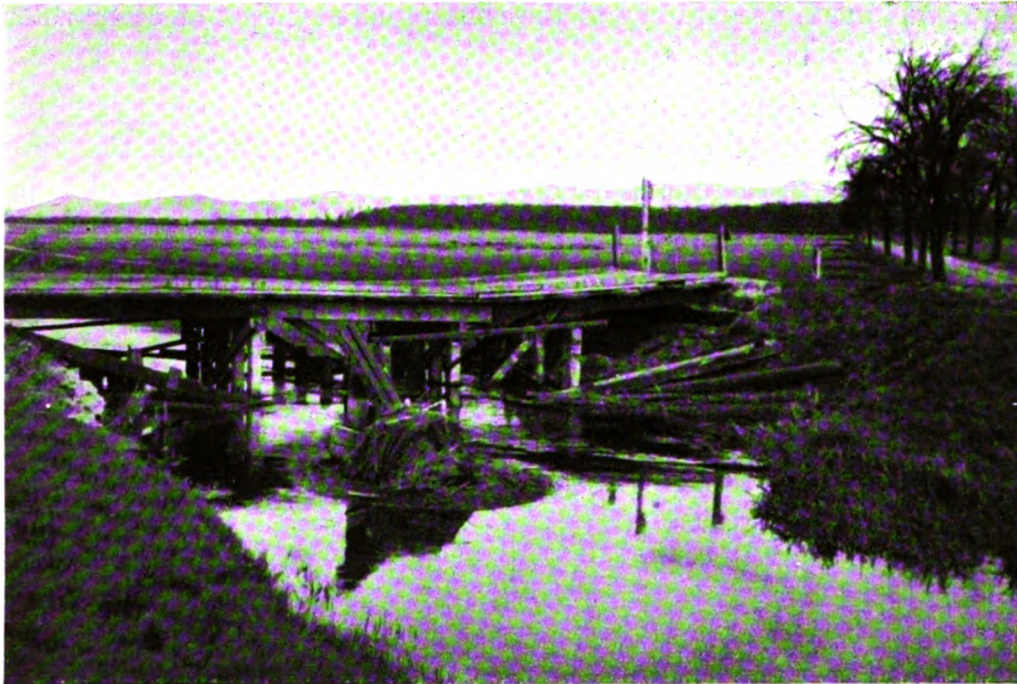
At about 0745 hours on 5 January enemy forces crossed the Rhine following patrols which had been making such crossings during the previous few days, and attacked American positions from Kilstett to Drusenheim. Elements of the 232nd Regiment in charge of two improvised Task Forces, A and B, designed to strike the enemy at Weyersheim and Kilstett, respectively. Because the river line had been lightly held and because a succession of reliefs was in process when the German attack came, the forces immediately thrown against the enemy were of unusual character and under mixed commands.

At 0700 hours on 5 January command of that part of the 314th Regiment, which was south of Hatten had passed to the 242nd Regiment, whose 1st and 3rd Battalions relieved the 314th during the night. When the attack came, the 2nd Battalion of the 242nd Infantry was beginning to move from Brumath. The move northward was canceled and the battalion was attached to the 232nd Infantry for an attack in the Weyersheim vicinity. The 314th Regiment, upon its relief by the 242nd, was on its way to an assembly area when orders from division sent it to Bischwiller to attack southeast toward Rohrwiller. During the day the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 222nd Infantry were relieving the 315th Regiment north of Haguenau, but the 2nd Battalion of the 222nd was stopped enroute and attached to the 232nd. The 79th Reconnaissance Troop was ordered to move at once to prepare for an attack on Rohrwiller. The rearrangement of army boundaries had put Kilstett in the sector of the First French Army, which was then attempting to carry out the relief scheduled for 5 January. Pending relief of Task Force Linden elements by the French, the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division was attached to the 79th Division.

When it attacked that afternoon, Task Force A consisted of a platoon of Company A of the 781st Tank Battalion, Company E of the

232nd, Company E of the 222nd, and Companies F and G of the 242nd Regiments. Late that night the remainder of the 242nd Infantry's 2nd Battalion joined the force. Task Force B included one platoon of Company L of the 232nd, Companies F and H of the 232nd, the 2nd Battalion of the 222nd (less Companies E and G), two platoons of Company A of the 781st Tank Battalion, a unit of 50 FFI, and the Cannon Company of the 232nd.

At 1545 hours Task Force A attacked astride the road from Weyersheim to Gambsheim. It was held up by automatic weapons fire at the Landgraben Canal, but troops on the right flank drove through,



WEYERSHEIM — GAMBSHEIM ROAD-BRIDGE ACROSS
LANDGRABEN CANAL

*" . . . At 1545 hours Task Force A attacked astride the road from Weyersheim to
Gambsheim . . . "*

crossed the canal, and reached the Kleingraben Creek, between the canal and the town. Darkness and loss of contact with the left flank element forced a withdrawal to the west bank of the canal for reorganization.

Elements of the force then advanced in the early morning to reach the railroad tracks west of Gamsheim at approximately 0800 hours on 8 January.

Task Force B had formed at La Wantzenau and moved to Kilstett, reinforcing a platoon there and jumping off at 1545 hours on 5 January toward Gamsheim. Heavy observed artillery fire held up this attack just north of Kilstett. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 314th Infantry had been alerted for movement to the bridgehead area about noon. During the remainder of the day they were able to do no more than to reach Bischwiller and to close into positions on the northeast, east, and southeast outskirts of the town. During the night reconnaissance was made preparatory to the contemplated attack on Rohrwiller at 0900 hours the next day.

On learning of the German attack, General Brooks, VI Corps Commander, had telephoned General Wyche, commanding the 79th Division, "Get in there and get it — get it cleaned up — its got to be cleaned up pronto . . . we can't let it get built up there." To aid the 79th Division, which controlled Task Force Linden, the corps issued Operations Instructions No. 5 at 1900 hours on 5 January narrowing the part of the division, which was directed to concentrate its efforts on the destruction of enemy forces on the west bank of the Rhine. The order attached Troop D of the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and Company B of the 47th Tank Battalion, both of the 14th Armored Division, to the 79th Division. The 45th Division was directed to assemble one infantry regiment of Task Force Herren for movement to the Haguenau area on corps order. By the time that order was issued the Germans were established in a bridgehead five miles long and two miles deep. Circumstances had prevented snuffing out the enemy attack quickly. The enemy had further opportunity to build up his forces during the night.

On the morning of 6 January elements of Task Force A entered Gamsheim and cleared the main part of it by systematically searching houses. House to house fighting lasted from 0930 to 1130 hours, during which time enemy opposition consisted largely of machine gun fire. Then in the face of an enemy counterattack Task Force A withdrew from Gamsheim and back to the canal where a defensive outpost was

established. Task Force B had also jumped off again in the morning, still attempting to get into Gamsheim from Kilstett; but its elements were out of contact and not mutually supporting. They were withdrawn on line with Kilstett and were ordered to patrol the area northwest of Kilstett to prevent enemy infiltration.

At 0830 hours on 6 January the 2nd Battalion of the 314th Infantry had jumped off from Bischwiller in the attack which had been planned for 0900 hours. The battalion had two companies in Rohrwiller by mid-morning and was accordingly directed by division to move first to Drusenheim and later to Herrlisheim. When a patrol of the 2nd



HERRLISHEIM — OFFENDORF AREA

"... the 3rd Battalion was ordered . . . to feel out the route to Herrlisheim, later to capture Offendorf . . ."

Battalion found the bridge in Drusenheim intact, the 3rd Battalion was ordered by division to move to Rohrwiller and then to feel out the route to Herrlisheim, later to capture Offendorf. These plans did not materialize,

however, for the 2nd Battalion was able to battle its way only a little beyond the southern edge of Drusenheim before nightfall. The 3rd Battalion stayed in Rohrwiller.

Farther north an enemy patrol had probed Stattmatten early in the day on 6 January, and elements of the 232nd Infantry had been surrounded there. Elements of the 79th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, with a light tank platoon of the 781st Tank Battalion attached, cleared Sessenheim and recaptured Stattmatten by noon. At the end of the day the 232nd Infantry re-established its lines in this sector.

At this point, as General Wyche reported to his Corps Commander, General Brooks, things were going poorly. "The real trouble is this mushroom organization plus the greenness of troops and lack of communications," he explained. General Wyche expressed his doubt that Task Force Linden could push to Gambsheim. "They've been in and out twice." He called to General Brooks' attention the fact that the Linden force had sustained heavy casualties and referred to "their state of training, organization and operation, etc." It had been known that the 42nd Division had training deficiencies which under normal circumstances should have precluded the employment of the division in combat before additional training could be given. The unit had been placed in a relatively quiet sector along the Rhine flank, but circumstances had made an inactive position the point of bitter fighting. General Wyche ended his report to General Brooks by saying, "I'm very sorry to have to present this situation, but that's the way it is." The most regrettable aspect of the situation was that the more time the enemy had to build up his forces in the bridgehead, the more likelihood there was that he could exploit his foothold into an expanding attack either in the Bischwiller-Haguenau direction or toward Strasbourg.

On 7 January, according to captured documents, the Oberrhein High Command received orders from the Fuehrer to lighten the task of Army Group G, conducting the general assault on Alsace, by exerting steady pressure from the Gambsheim bridgehead and making the most of the success achieved at Rhinau, south of Strasbourg. Accordingly, the enemy continued to build up his forces in the bridgehead, reinforcing those already there with tanks, selfpropelled and antitank guns. The

enemy's new strength was apparent shortly after the 2nd Battalion of the 314th Infantry attacked to clear the enemy from the southern part of Drusenheim on the morning of 7 January. The enemy counterattacked almost at once with approximately a battalion of infantry and eight or ten tanks. The American battalion was forced back into the northern part of the village, losing five of its supporting tanks. The 3rd Battalion of the 314th Regiment drove off two attacks southeast of Rohrwiller in the same period. Northwest of Gambsheim Task Force Linden had little activity, and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 232nd Infantry were relieved in the Kilstett sector by elements of the 3rd Algerian Infantry Division, which was carrying out in so far as possible the relief ordered on 5 January. French troops moved north in the afternoon but were forced by enemy counterattacks to withdraw again to positions in Kilstett. On the northern flank of the bridgehead the 79th Reconnaissance Troop interrupted an enemy patrol at Stattmatten.

The phrase "success at Rhinau", used by the Germans in the order of 7 January for continuance of pressure in the Gambsheim bridgehead, referred to an offensive northward out of the Colmar Pocket toward Strasbourg. What has been described by the German Nineteenth Army Chief of Staff as a "limited attack" was launched north along the Rhine-Rhone Canal from a line just south of Rhinau early on 7 January. The attack progressed northward on both sides of the canal and was through Rossfeld and Rhinau on 8 January. In the week that followed, the attack was contained by French armor that came to the aid of the 1st Moroccan Infantry Division, which had been pushed north to positions between Erstein and the Rhine. The enemy never succeeded in getting farther north than these positions nor farther east than the Ill River near Benfeld, except for a small bridgehead directly east of Benfeld. By 16 January there was no longer strong enemy pressure in this area, although Seventh Army had been seriously concerned by this threat behind its lines.

On 7 January Combat Command B of the 12th Armored Division closed in at Hochfelden, between Saverne and Haguenau, on Seventh Army order and was attached to the 79th Division. By noon the next day army had sent the rest of the division to VI Corps. While

other combat commands were given a reconnaissance mission in corps reserve and held ready to repel possible enemy penetrations from the north or the east, Combat Command B was moved to Bischwiller to attack Herrlisheim.

Task Force Power, composed of the 714th Tank Battalion less one company and to which Company C of the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion had been added, attacked toward Herrlisheim from Rohrwiller on the morning of 8 January but was held up by a blown bridge over the Zorn River north of the town. That night the line was held in the vicinity of Rohrwiller. The next day the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion resumed the attack. Forward elements entered Herrlisheim at 1130 hours and proceeded to consolidate the northern third of the town under heavy enemy fire. At 0330 hours on 10 January the elements in Herrlisheim were cut off by the enemy, but during the succeeding morning tanks of the 714th Battalion cut the ring. Mounting casualties and heavy enemy fire forced American withdrawal from the town; the withdrawal was completed during the night, and the combat command took up defensive positions parallel to the Zorn River east of Rohrwiller.

While the attack of Combat Command B had been going on, there was no other major action on the bridgehead front, the efforts of the 79th Division being expended primarily in the Hatten-Rittershoffen area to the north. Activity was confined to local attacks, counterattacks, and reconnaissance patrols, none of them decisive in character. The enemy had been able to hold his ground in the bridgehead.

German Attack from the North

An enemy offensive in the Hatten-Rittershoffen sector toward Haguenau prevented VI Corps from giving its full attention to the Gamsheim threat. At the beginning of the year the 79th Infantry Division had held forward VI Corps positions from Wissembourg east along the France-German border to the Rhine. The first step in the planned Seventh Army withdrawal was smoothly executed by the division in moving back to Maginot line positions during the night 2-3 January. The main line of resistance thus became an arc from Drachen-

bronn southwest of Wissembourg to an anchor on the Rhine River at Fort Louis. Bridges over the Lauter River had been blown during the course of withdrawal. The enemy followed up these withdrawals only with increased patrols.

During 4 January and the early hours of the establishment of the Gambsheim bridgehead on the following day, enemy activity in front of 79th Division Maginot Line positions was negligible except for occasional patrols. On 6 January, however, there were indications that the enemy was building up his forces south of Wissembourg. On the morning of the following day he supplemented his Rhine bridgehead attack with



ANCIENT FORT LOUIS

" . . . The main line of resistance thus became an arc . . . to an anchor on the Rhine River at Fort Louis . . . "

a drive in the Aschbach-Stundwiller-Buhl area northeast of Hatten and Rittershoffen. Enemy infantry identified as elements of the 21st Panzer Division supported by armor burst into the three towns. Outposts of the

313th Infantry Regiment in Aschbach were forced to withdraw to the main line of resistance. At 0900 hours enemy troops dressed in white parkas, took Stundwiller and continued on to occupy the town of Buhl. The divisional main line of resistance, however, remained unbroken against five strong enemy attacks, which were curtailed by mortar and artillery concentrations. On the next day the line of the 313th Infantry was heavily engaged when the enemy launched numerous attacks in two-battalion strength in the vicinity of Aschbach. These attacks were repelled with heavy losses in personnel and tanks. The 222nd and 242nd Infantry Regiments, formerly of Task Force Linden, continued to main-



AREA NORTH OF HATTEN

"... the enemy struck in the Stundwiller area and hurled a two-battalion assault supported by seven tanks on Hatten ..."

tain their positions in the Maginot Line to the west and east of the 313th Infantry with only light contact during the day.

Early in the morning on 9 January, after completing a rapid reorganization, the enemy struck in the Stundwiller area and hurled a

two-battalion assault supported by seven tanks on Hatten. Elements of the 242nd Infantry were forced to withdraw temporarily from their positions, but by 0940 hours the line had been restored and the attack dispersed except for a few snipers left in the town. Prisoner of war identifications indicated that the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division had joined the 21st Panzer Division in the attack on this sector. At 1300 hours on the same day the enemy returned to Hatten with 25 to 30 tanks spearheading an undetermined number of infantry. Within an hour Hatten was enclosed on three sides, and enemy tanks had by-passed the town to reach the area just south of Rittershoffen. A heavy concentration of artillery and tank destroyer fire broke the momentum of the attack, and a counterattack by the 242nd Infantry at 1500 hours forced the enemy armor to withdraw to the east. In the course of the enemy retreat a small group was left behind in the eastern portion of Hatten. This group received continuous reinforcements and withstood throughout 10 January all efforts to dislodge it. The reinforced 2nd Battalion of the 315th Infantry, which had taken up positions in Rittershoffen was committed on the afternoon of 10 January to help clear Hatten. At the end of the day the unit was heavily engaged in the eastern section of the town.

On 11 January after an enemy artillery barrage had been concentrated in the western half of Hatten, enemy troops cloaked by a curtain of mist and snow, infiltrated to the northern end of Rittershoffen. As the enemy continued to build up his forces there by infiltration, intense close-in fighting developed in Hatten, where reinforced hostile infantrymen were being supported by 15 tanks before noon. The 3rd Battalion of the 315th Infantry contrived to contain the enemy in the north end of Rittershoffen after a day of heavy fighting. However, enemy armored sweeps driving on Hatten from the south and north had in the course of the day succeeded in isolating the 2nd Battalion of the 315th Infantry in the southwest corner of the town. To prevent the situation from further deterioration Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division drove east from Kuhlendorf in an abortive attempt to clear Rittershoffen and continue on to Hatten. Combat Command A was stopped 400 yards short of Rittershoffen. Both battalions of the 315th

Infantry were surrounded, as the enemy armored thrusts had by the end of the day enveloped Rittershoffen.

On the following day Combat Command A drove to the northern end of Rittershoffen, which was cleared of the enemy by noon except for a strongpoint held in the cemetery at the southeastern corner of the town. Combat Command B jumped off at 1115 hours to rescue the Hatten garrison but made very little progress. The attack was halted 500 yards west of the town when armored infantry was pinned down by heavy machine gun and small arms fire. Two supporting tanks were knocked out by 88mm fire. Enemy tanks which had taken up positions



CEMETERY IN RITTERSHOFFEN

"... Combat Command A drove to the northern end of Rittershoffen, which was cleared of the enemy by noon except for a strongpoint held in the cemetery . . ."

on the western fringe of the town prevented the heavy employment of Combat Command B armor. The attenuated 2nd Battalion of the 315th Infantry in heavy contact continued to hold in the southwest corner of Hatten.

The Hatten-Rittershoffen sector continued to be the center of activity on the VI Corps front throughout 13 January, as repeated assaults by the 14th Armored Division were made in an attempt to restore Maginot line positions of the 79th Division. Combat Command A and the attached 3rd Battalion of the 315th Infantry were compelled to fight bitterly for Rittershoffen. Reinforced enemy troops were supported by flak wagons, flame throwers, and tanks. Toward the close of the day, as the enemy was gradually being squeezed out, a sudden heavy counter-attack which developed from the northeast reversed the trend. The day ended with enemy firmly entrenched in the church and cemetery positions in the southeastern section of Rittershoffen.

Meanwhile to the east Combat Command B after three attempts to outflank Hatten from the northeast was forced to withdraw because of artillery and antitank fire from Buhl. During the day Combat Command R blasted its way into Hatten by means of a frontal assault from the west and established contact with what remained of the 2nd Battalion of the 315th Infantry. Intense house-to-house fighting continued throughout 13 January. By evening tanks of Combat Command R had virtually surrounded the town and just before midnight a considerable number of enemy tanks and infantry withdrew to the northeast.

On the next day the battle in the two towns continued to be waged furiously with neither side able to establish more than a local superiority, which lasted only until the next counterattack restored the balance. The enemy held the northern end of Hatten by virtue of a heavy night attack which cancelled much of the gains made by Combat Command R during the day. Rittershoffen was quiet on 15 January; but the tension increased in Hatten, where after a morning of intermittent localized fighting the enemy struck in the afternoon with a battalion of infantry supported by a few tanks. Enemy troops were reinforced by elements of the 7th German Parachute Division and threatened by 1715 hours to overrun infantry troops of the 315th Regiment and Combat Command R. The 47th Tank Battalion counterattacked and drove through to the almost surrounded infantry within an hour. This was but a prelude to further heavy action. At the end of the day the southern

and western sections of the town were secured, as enemy resistance slackened.

The German command continued to attach considerable importance to the Hatten-Rittershoffen salient because it was an ideal area of departure for a drive toward Haguenau. It was indicated that the enemy intended to relieve the badly mauled 21st Panzer and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divisions with the 7th Parachute Division. The battle without decision wore on, with the enemy clinging to the church and cemetery in Rittershoffen and the east side of Hatten. On 17 January the 1st Battalion of the 315th Infantry attacked Rittershoffen from the north-



RAILROAD STATION AT THE SOUTHEAST EDGE OF HATTEN

" . . . At the end of the day the southern and western sections of the town were secured, as enemy resistance slackened . . . "

west. Heavy fighting ensued, but the added strength given by the 1st Battalion did not disturb the deadlock. Combat Command R preserved its position in western Hatten by repelling two attacks each supported by ten tanks.

On 18 January enemy aggressiveness decreased, and there were indications that his strength was being withdrawn from this sector for displacement to the south to support an attack in the Sessenheim area. Both sides maintained their positions in Hatten and Rittershoffen, as the fighting slackened in intensity. On 19 January, however, the 21st Panzer Division launched a three-pronged attack in Hatten from the northeast, east, and southeast at 0800 hours employing infantry supported by mortar, artillery, and tank fire. This assault and another enemy attack which took place just before noon were contained. These holding attacks concluded serious effort in this area. Though the enemy had suffered severe personnel and materiel losses here, the similarly weakened condition of the 14th Armored Division and the absence of reinforcements forestalled a major attack to restore original Maginot line positions.

Attack and Counterattack in the Bridgehead

The sector of the enemy Rhine bridgehead had become quiet after the failure of Combat Command B to take Herrlisheim during the period 8-10 January. The rest of the 12th Armored Division had entered the corps area and maintained a reconnaissance screen along the corps south boundary until 13 January, when orders were received for the division to attack the bridgehead. The 79th Division was to be prepared to relieve the 12th Armored elements along the line of the Rhine River.

In the early hours of 16 January Combat Command B attacked to the east to establish a bridgehead across the Zorn River in the vicinity of Rohrwiller, and Combat Command A moved out to attack enemy positions in the direction of Offendorf. Meeting stiff enemy resistance, both combat commands made only slow progress during the day. They renewed their attacks on the morning of 17 January. Combat Command A attacked Herrlisheim from the south and east with the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion and the 43rd Tank Battalion while Combat Command B attempted to extend its bridgehead east of the Zorn. Though Combat Command B was delayed by heavy artillery, mortar,

and small arms fire, the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion of Combat Command A succeeded in occupying a third of the southern part of Herrlisheim. During the night, however, the battalion was surrounded by a superior enemy force. Nearly 200 men fell into enemy hands in the town.

On the same day, part of the 43rd Tank Battalion was also lost in Herrlisheim. The 43rd Battalion, which had lost 12 tanks in the attack on Offendorf on 16 January, attacked Herrlisheim from the east as the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion attacked from the south. "Things are pretty hot", the Tank Battalion Commander told his executive in the



ENEMY GUN POSITION WEST OF OFFENDORF. KNOCKED OUT
AMERICAN TANKS IN BACKGROUND

" . . . The 43rd Battalion . . . lost 12 tanks in the attack on Offendorf on 16 January . . . "

last message received from the Battalion. A later reconnaissance of Herrlisheim revealed that 14 tanks of the 29 that had advanced on Herrlisheim were knocked out on its eastern edge. At daylight on 18

January a task force composed of Company B of the 66th Armored Infantry Battalion and Company B of the 23rd Tank Battalion launched an attack to relieve the troops thought to be still in Herrlisheim, but the enemy repulsed the attack.

Meanwhile, Combat Command B advanced only slowly against stiffening resistance, which blocked its efforts to reach a rail and highway crossing north and east of Herrlisheim. Finally, the command was forced by heavy artillery and small arms fire to withdraw under cover of darkness. The attack was resumed in the early morning of 18 January but failed to make much headway. During the afternoon all troops west of the Zorn were ordered to occupy defensive positions and reorganize for renewal of the offensive. In the early hours of 19 January the complete withdrawal of troops under cover of darkness to occupy defensive positions along the line west of the Zorn was ordered. As forces were withdrawn during the night of 18-19 January, small enemy counterattacks were repulsed.

After several small-scale attacks in the morning and early afternoon of 19 January had been repulsed, the drive of the 10th SS Panzer Division against 12th Armored Division positions made substantial progress in the late afternoon. At 1630 hours hostile infantry supported by ten tanks secured and crossed the bridge over the Landgraben Canal on the Gambsheim-Weyersheim road. Artillery immediately knocked out eight of the tanks. Fifteen minutes later an estimated 200 infantry supported by 17 tanks crossed the Zorn River at Herrlisheim and attacked northwest toward Rohrwiller, and at 1715 hours another force of 400 infantry and 17 tanks crossed the bridge over the Landgraben Canal. Tank destroyer and artillery fire knocked out 27 of the enemy tanks during the battle, and improved weather conditions made possible a heavy air program. Sixteen missions of 190 sorties dropped more than 100 tons of bombs, primarily on hostile concentrations in the Herrlisheim-Offendorf area. But the enemy's offensive punch was strong enough to force the 12th Armored Division to fall to a general defensive line running roughly between Weyersheim and Rohrwiller.

As early as 17 January General Patch had asked General Brooks if he wanted to use the 36th Division. At 1200 hours on 19

January VI Corps directed the 36th Division to assemble in reserve prepared to attack on order through positions of the 12th Armored Division to eliminate hostile forces in the Drusenheim-Herrlisheim area. At 1800 hours, after the 10th SS Panzer Division attack was well started, the 36th Division was ordered into the line to relieve the 12th Armored, which was by this time 1,200 understrength in men and had lost 70 vehicles. As the VI Corps G-3 reported to Seventh Army by telephone, "We are moving Dahlquist in to stabilize Weyersheim-Rohrwiller generally." Two regiments of the 36th Division, the 142nd and 143rd, were moved quickly from corps reserve and had assumed command of their assigned sectors at 2100 hours. The 12th Armored moved into corps reserve and on 21 January established a counter-reconnaissance screen along the VI Corps south boundary from Wasselonne to Weyersheim. On 22 January the division went under the operational control of First French Army for employment South of Strasbourg.

German Attack South to Sessenheim

It later became known that on 9 January the Führer had issued an order that Haguenau must be taken and all American forces located between the Lower Vosges and the Rhine eliminated. Contact with the Gambsheim bridgehead was to be established by the 10th SS Panzer Division attacking east of the forest of Haguenau and south along the Rhine. The next objective of Army Group G, under which all forces attacking VI Corps were operating, was still the Saverne Gap. The decision as to whether and when the northern wing of the Nineteenth Army in the Colmar Pocket would be committed against Molsheim west of Strasbourg depended somewhat on the success of the link between the forces of the 10th SS Panzer Division and the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division in the bridgehead.

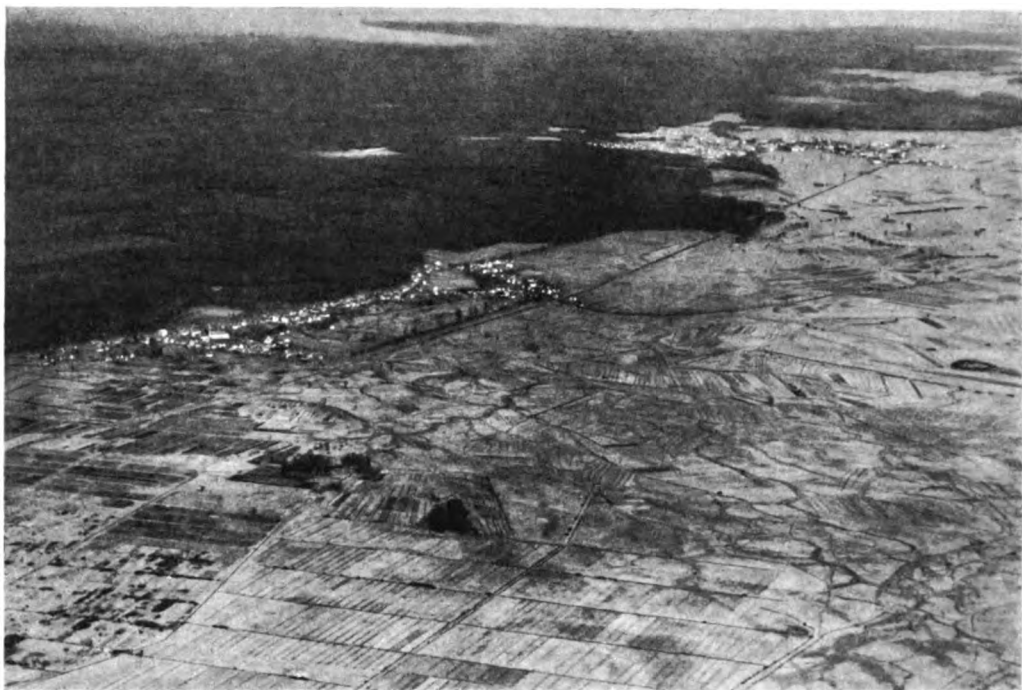
A supplementary order for the operation against Sessenheim was issued on 12 January. The forces holding positions in the Forstfeld-Beinheim area south of Seltz and facing Task Force Linden and 79th Division elements were to be subordinated to the XXXIX Panzer Corps,

which was in turn to be under Army Group Oberrhein. The Commander-in-Chief West was to rush as many Jagdtiger (tank destroyers) to the corps as possible and to introduce the 25th Panzer Grenadier and 21st Panzer Division on that front as soon as possible. The attack was to begin only when sufficient forces were available to exploit the breakthrough immediately. It was necessary to progress steadily and to avoid expending the infantry of the attack division in "guerilla warfare." The reason for the change in direction of effort of the XXXIX Corps was that the attack in the Hatten-Rittershoffen area had definitely been stopped by American forces. Accordingly, the German 7th Parachute Division, reinforced by the 667th and 384th Assault Gun Brigades, and the 10th SS Panzer Division were to make the attack from Forstfeld-Beinheim via Roeschwoog in the direction of Sessenheim and Drusenheim. If Drusenheim were reached, the mass of the XXXIX Panzer Corps was to follow. Infiltration across the Rhine assisted the operation.

The enemy force struck in the area of the 232nd Regiment of Task Force Linden. On 16 January a listening post of the 232nd Infantry in Dengolsheim was captured, and enemy estimated to be 60 or 70 in number moved toward Sessenheim. American infantry elements with a platoon of tanks retook Dengolsheim but were not able to eliminate the enemy, as was intended. The enemy built up a concentration in a bridgehead north of Dalhunden and attacked early on 17 January. Roeschwoog was attacked and captured; outposts in Stattmatten and Dengolsheim were driven in; enemy infiltrated around Sessenheim and cut off a company of American infantry. A counterattack cleared Sessenheim of enemy, but the attacking force was strong enough to manage only a demonstration toward Dengolsheim. A projected attack by the 3rd Battalion of the 232nd Infantry and two companies of the 314th Regiment which had been attached failed to materialize. A platoon of light tanks of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and the 1st Battalion of the 313th Regiment were attached to Task Force Linden.

Early on 18 January elements of the 232nd Infantry, holding Sessenheim, were attacked and surrounded. Farther north at Kauffenheim one company was attacked by a small patrol but held firm. Other elements withdrew westward from the Bois de Sessenheim to the Bois

de Soufflenheim at 1430 hours, when a strong attack was launched against it. The 1st Battalion of the 410th Infantry, which arrived in Soufflenheim early that morning, moved into the Bois de Soufflenheim



**SOUFFLENHEIM AREA SHOWING HAGUENAU FOREST
IN THE BACKGROUND**

"... The 1st Battalion of the 410th Infantry ... arrived in Soufflenheim early that morning ... prior to making an attack northeast at 1500 hours ..."

prior to making an attack northeast at 1500 hours in an attempt to capture Sessenheim. But the American withdrawal from the Bois de Sessenheim gave the enemy ground from which he could bring flanking and enfilade fire on the attack. The direction of attack was then changed, and the battalion jumped off at 1625 hours to the east to clear the woods. The attack was not entirely successful.

On the morning of 19 January the 3rd Battalion of the 411th Regiment attacked with eight tanks of the 781st Tank Battalion to capture Sessenheim. The town was entered about 0800 hours, but heavy enemy fire eliminated all the tanks and forced the battalion to withdraw.

General Wyche ordered all units to take up defensive positions. The 411th Infantry took up its position along the southern edge of the Bois de Soufflenheim and at 2200 hours was ordered to close the gap to the south between Task Force Linden and the 314th Regiment of the 79th Division. This gap was made when enemy infantry with tanks attacked southwestward from the Bois de Sessenheim and isolated the 2nd Battalion of the 314th Infantry in Drusenheim. The enemy continued to exert pressure on 20 January against elements of the 232nd, 313th, and 314th Regiments and infiltrated through the lines, breaking contact between the 3rd Battalion of the 314th Infantry and the 3rd Battalion of the 411th Infantry.

The Moder Line

After VI Corps had been ordered to hold in place midway in its projected movement to Vosges positions, plans were still being made for possible further withdrawal. Seventh Army had been directed by Sixth Army Group on 7 January to organize alternate defense lines between positions at Ingwiller and Haguenau along the general line of the Moder River. Withdrawal to these positions was to be made only in the face of strong enemy pressure. On 12 January VI Corps issued a planning document outlining a withdrawal to a new line along the Moder from Wimmenau to Haguenau to Bischwiller. This was to be used if the increasing enemy pressure should necessitate a withdrawal to more favorable defensive positions. A variation of the same plan was issued on 14 January. Though pressure in the Bitche and Hatten sectors was lessening on 19 January, the enemy had made considerable progress in the face of heavy losses in materiel and personnel in the Gambsheim-Herrlisheim-Drusenheim-Sessenheim area. His attack toward Bischwiller and Haguenau had been successful enough to cause VI Corps to issue that day further tentative plans for withdrawal to a line including Wimmenau-Haguenau-Bischwiller-Weyersheim.

It was on the Moder River, which flows out of the Vosges and along the southern edge of the Haguenau Forest to the Rhine, that VI Corps planned to establish most of the new defensive line. The enemy's

activities in the Gamsheim bridgehead and in the attack from the north had made the stretch of the Moder east of Bischwiller untenable. Accordingly the proposed line curved to the south between Bischwiller and Weyersheim, where the First French Army sector began.

The heavy fighting in Alsace had taken its toll of the American divisions. Combat efficiency reports for the six regular divisions in VI Corps showed on 19 January that only two, the 36th and 103rd, rated even "very satisfactory." The 45th and 79th Infantry Divisions and the 14th Armored Division were listed as "satisfactory" and the 12th



BAILEY BRIDGE ACROSS THE MODER AT BISCHWILLER

"... On 12 January VI Corps issued a planning document outlining a withdrawal to a new line along the Moder from Wimmenau to Haguenau to Bischwiller . . ."

Armored as "unsatisfactory." Task Force Linden and Herren were adjudged "unsatisfactory." Combat fatigue and low or very low infantry strength were plaguing all the divisions. The 12th Armored was sched-

uled for reorganization after current operations, and Task Force Linden and Herren were to be given "additional unit training." In view of the status of these forces and the fact that it appeared obvious that the enemy was gathering his forces for a renewed attack, General Patch informed General Devers of his inability to hold his front as it existed, and General Devers gave the order to withdraw as planned.

The American withdrawal was a source of considerable embarrassment to the enemy. In addition to wasting much ammunition, he had to follow up, hampered by obstacles and small delaying actions, definitely locate the new line by reconnaissance and probing attacks, and move an adequate supply of ammunition forward. This was a process made slow and laborious by the enemy's limited transportation and the poor road net. The withdrawal saved American troops losses from artillery fire, served to maintain the integrity of units, and afforded a breathing spell. The establishment of the new line was carried on during the night of 20-21 January and completed by morning on schedule, despite the icy condition of roads, which hampered movement of tracked vehicles particularly. Combat Command A of the 14th Armored Division covered the movement of the 79th Division from the critical northeast corner of the VI Corps zone, while the withdrawals from the rest of the front were screened by small infantry units, which completed all demolitions as scheduled. Only small hostile patrols appeared in the vacated areas during the day after contact was broken. By the end of 21 January the VI Corps divisions were well established, and substantial reserves had been assembled to meet the expected continuation of enemy efforts to retake Alsace.

General Patch considered the situation of his own troops and that of the enemy and observed to General Brooks: "I think he (the enemy) is getting a little tired. I think we will be able to hang on all right." The German attack from the north in the general area of Sessenheim and the withdrawal to the Moder line changed the disposition of the American forces considerably. The German bridgehead at Gambsheim was no longer an isolated sector. The VI Corps front lay along a line which passed through Rothbach and Muhlhausen on the Rothbach River and ran along the Rothbach until it joined the Moder at Pfaffen-

hoffen and Niedermodern. From there the line was on the Moder all the way to Bischwiller. Then the line turned south, passing just east of Kurtzenhausen and Weyersheim to Hoerdt. The French First Army line extended east from Hoerdt through Kilstett to the Rhine.

On the new VI Corps defense line on 21 January were deployed the 45th and 103rd Divisions, the 79th with Task Force Linden attached, and the 36th Divisions. On the west flank of VI Corps the 45th Division held the line northwest of Rothbach in and around Reipertswiller. Just east of the 45th Division the 410th Regiment was in the sector between



NORTH OF MUHLHAUSEN LOOKING TOWARDS ROTHBACH

" . . . Just east of the 45th Division the 410th Regiment was in the sector between Rothbach and Muhlhausen . . . "

Rothbach and Muhlhausen and the 409th between Muhlhausen and the vicinity of Niedermodern.

The regiments of the 103rd Division, which had been transferred to VI Corps beginning 13 January after a paper transfer from XV to XXI

Corps, had entered the VI Corps line on the Philippsbourg front, and had later sent elements to participate in the fighting near Sessenheim. At the time of its transfer to VI Corps, the 103rd Division had announced the assumption of command by Brigadier General A. C. McAuliffe, formerly assistant commander of the 101st Airborne Division. In the 79th Division section of the line were two regiments of Task Force Linden and two of the 79th Division, reaching from Niedermodern through Schweighausen, Kaltenhouse, and Oberhoffen to Bischwiller. The 36th Division held the sector between Bischwiller and Hoerdt, and the 3rd Algerian Division had the line between Hoerdt and the Rhine. Ranging from west to east on the same line, the German divisions facing the American forces were the 6th SS Mountain, the 36th Volks Grenadier, the 47th Volks Grenadier, 7th Parachute, 10th SS Panzer, and 21st Panzer Divisions. The forces of the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division were still in what had been the bridgehead area.



BRIGADIER GENERAL
ANTHONY C. McAULIFFE
". . . transferred to VI Corps . . ."

On 21 January, while the other units were adjusting into the Moder Line, the 36th Division remained in heavy contact as the enemy probed for a weak spot through which to send tanks and infantry. At noon a concentration of 15 enemy tanks put on a demonstration south of Bischwiller between Kurtzenhausen and Herrlisheim; several of the tanks were knocked out by division tank destroyers and artillery and the rest of them driven off to the northeast. At the same time approximately 12 tanks were observed heading northwest from the bridge over the Landgraben Canal on the road between Gambsheim and Weyersheim and were driven off before their artillery could join them. An estimated 100 enemy infantry infiltrated positions near Kurtzenhausen but were surrounded and mopped up.

The orders German Army Group G received on 22 January were to attack in Lower Alsace in order to gain at least the line Ingwiller-Kilstett and if possible to push forward to Saverne. The attack was to be continued as long as there was any expectation of destroying the enemy north of the Haguenau-Saverne line or of compelling a retreat beyond the Saverne Gap and consequently renewing contact with the Nineteenth Army in the Colmar Pocket. The principle activity of the enemy that day was a rapid and heavy follow-up to the American line. Enemy movements observed during the day appeared to be converging in the area of Zinswiller, northeast of Rothbach, and in the vicinity of Bischwiller-Weyersheim. The rapid follow-up and the apparent areas of concentration indicated the enemy's intention of continuing his offensive action.

Corps Operations Instructions received late in the day on 22 January directed immediate organization for defense by all units in rear of division sectors and continuous security patrols to guard against enemy infiltration or parachute drops. Snow began to fall and in a week's period was a foot deep. The temperature remained below freezing, often as low as ten degrees below zero. As the VI Corps prepared for a new German attack, it ordered the reinforcement of the fires of the 36th Division by the artillery of the 14th Armored Division.

The enemy continued his build-up east of the Zorn River on 23 January, and his patrols probed the entire front for an opening through which to make an armored thrust. Regiments on line repulsed patrols and improved defenses. The enemy air effort for the day was concentrated on a triangle formed by Bischwiller, Brumath, and Weyersheim, where 21 planes bombed and strafed the 36th Division area between 0930 and 1435 hours.

The anticipated attack on the Moder line got under way on the night of 24-25 January as the bulk of six hostile divisions were concentrated in three prongs reaching across the river. The 6th SS Mountain Division broke through positions of the 410th Regiment to take Schillersdorf, while the 36th Volks Grenadier Division put heavy pressure on the rest of the 103rd Division front. Another assault was made on the 222nd Regiment between Neubourg and Schweighausen by the 47th

Volks Grenadier, 25th Panzer Grenadier, and 7th Parachute Divisions. The third claw of the offensive was thrown across the Moder at Kaltenhaue, against the 242nd Infantry by the 10th SS Panzer Division. A diversionary attack was launched against the 3rd Algerian Division by elements of the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division. While the drives near Schweighausen and at Kaltenhaue were part of a double envelopment to take Haguenau and Brumath, a further objective of this major attack on the Moder front was probably Strasbourg. A prisoner captured during the offensive said Strasbourg "should" be in German hands by 30 January to commemorate the 12th anniversary of the National Socialist Revolution.

The 222nd Regiment occupied a line extending from approximately 1,000 yards west of Neubourg to the east edge of Schweighausen, a distance of approximately five miles. The 3rd Battalion was on the west, the 2nd Battalion on the east, and the 1st Battalion in reserve. At 0800 hours on 23 January the outpost line of resistance of the 222nd Infantry was driven back to the south bank of the Moder. To combat this threat the 1st Battalion was moved out of reserve to Ohlungen just behind the Regiment's Moder line.

On 24 January the enemy began artillery concentration along the entire sector of the 222nd Regiment with particularly heavy shelling on Schweighausen and Neubourg. At 2005 hours enemy infantry launched its attack, which penetrated the Ohlungen Forest. Company E was surrounded but held its ground and continued to fight on the main line of resistance until all ammunition was exhausted. Thirty men and two officers then infiltrated back through the enemy, which held the eastern portion of the Ohlungen Forest and the northern portion of the town of Schweighausen. Company B of the 1st Battalion attacked early on 25 January to meet the enemy advance but was held up by strong infantry resistance. The 1st Battalion did, however, succeed in reaching a position on the enemy's west flank and containing his force in the eastern portion of the wood. Despite heavy infantry attacks, the 2nd Battalion remained in the southern part of Schweighausen, while the 3rd Battalion held its positions.

Immediately after the attack a special task force which had been used in repelling the Hatten-Rittershoffen attacks, was reorganized, including the 232nd, 222nd, and 314th Regiments and Combat Com-



FROM NEUBOURG LOOKING TOWARDS OHLUNGEN FOREST

" . . . Thirty men and two officers then infiltrated back through the enemy, which held the eastern portion of the Ohlungen Forest . . . "

mand B of the 14th Armored Division. The 232nd Infantry was moved forward to the 222nd area. The 2nd Battalion sent to Schweighausen attacked the northern part of the town from the east. The 1st Battalion closed in Uhlwiller, slightly to the south and west of Ohlungen Forest, at 1630 hours; and the 3rd Battalion closed in Ohlungen at 1600 hours on the same day, 25 January. Both towns were outposted. At 0730 hours on 26 January the task force launched an attack to clear the enemy from south of the Moder. The Moder line was restored without resistance, for the enemy had withdrawn during the night.

On the other side of Haguenau the outposts of the 242nd Infantry had been forced back across the river in its sector from the east edge of that city to Kaltenhouse late on 22 January. On 23 January the build-up of the enemy across the river continued. During the period of the initial attack on the Schweighausen area west of Haguenau the 242nd Infantry had received moderate artillery, small arms, and mortar fire. But at 0100 hours on 25 January an estimated two battalions of enemy crossed the Moder River in rubber boats at three points, striking at the east flank between the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. The attack penetrated the line about 400 or 500 yards but was met with stubborn resistance. At 1400 hours the two battalions on line, supported by elements of the 1st Battalion, counterattacked, surrounded several groups of the enemy, and by 1700 hours had driven the others back across the river.

The third of the enemy coordinated attacks against the VI Corps Moder line struck on 25 January in the eastern foothills of the Low Vosges. Throughout 23 January the enemy had continued to move reinforcements into Bitschoffen and Zinswiller, north and east of the 103rd Division sector. The 103rd Reconnaissance Troops engaged a strong enemy force in Bitschoffen and subsequently retired southeast to La Walck, immediately north of Pfaffenhoffen, only to find enemy troops already in that town. Prisoners taken in the action at La Walck constituted the advance elements of a much larger force, whose immediate objective was Pfaffenhoffen. The enemy launched a strong attack against the 2nd Battalion of the 410th Regiment at Rothbach. A company was surrounded and outpost positions became untenable when fighting broke out in Rothbach. The situation was stabilized along the high ground west of Muhlhausen early in the morning, and new positions were coordinated with those of adjacent units.

During the following morning the enemy repeatedly launched tank supported attacks in the sector of the 410th Regiment without penetrating the line. The first attack was repulsed at Bischholz with heavy enemy losses. However, another attack was immediately launched at Muhlhausen, necessitating further readjustment of the outpost line in that zone. Despite heavy losses the enemy continued to bring up

reserves in the vicinity of Rothbach. Just before noon the enemy made a strong and determined attack against the 3rd Battalion, driving the outpost back to the southeast edge of Muhlhausen. Again the attacks failed to penetrate the main line of resistance, and enemy formations were dispersed with heavy losses in personnel and tanks. Division and corps artillery contributed close and effective support.

Early on 25 January German reinforcements arrived at the front, and the main attack was launched. Groups of two and three enemy, some equipped with skis, were entering Muhlhausen. Attacks against both the 409th and 410th Regiments drove in the outposts. The enemy thrusts were, however, contained; and the line was restored when the enemy was blocked off by the 2nd Battalion of the 411th Regiment. At 0430 hours an enemy force estimated at company strength and supported by tanks unleashed a powerful attack on Kindwiller. At first repulsed, the enemy was able to capture Kindwiller and force the line back to La Walck. In another attack at the same time the enemy forced his way through the lines of the 410th Infantry to Schillersdorf- where the attack was contained. Slow progress was made in the face of bitter and fanatical resistance, when the 1st Battalion of the 410th Infantry, called up from reserve, counterattacked to the northeast at 0900 hours and cut the Schillersdorf-Muhlhausen road with two infantry companies and a platoon of tanks.

Early in the afternoon a company entered Schillersdorf and engaged the enemy in a strong fire fight; and another company, with considerable difficulty, liquidated a strongpoint to the north of the town and finally succeeded in partially by-passing the pocket of resistance localized in Schillersdorf. Two companies, one with an open flank on the east, despite heavy and continuous shelling throughout the day, contained the enemy on the outskirts of Schillersdorf. In the zone of the 3rd Battalion of the 410th Regiment one company first blunted the drive and later absorbed it after being forced back to the edge of town.

Early in the morning of 26 January the battalion commander committed his reserve elements, which halted the enemy in the front of the main line of resistance. Prime consideration was given to a gap south of Muhlhausen, through which the Germans were receiving reinforce-

ments and supplies. With close support and cooperation of the 781st Tank Battalion and heavy support of the division artillery infantry troops were able to cut off the supply route and seal off the enemy in Schillersdorf and Muhlhausen. Mopping-up operations were not completed until the next day, however.

Meanwhile the zone of the 36th Division between Bischwiller and Weyersheim was quiet except for occasional minor patrol clashes and occasional light artillery fire. The enemy attacks on both sides of Haguenau had been successfully repelled, and the line had been restored. The 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron continued to screen the corps south boundary and maintain contact with the French II Corps. The enemy never regained the initiative after the final attack against Seventh Army across the Moder on 25 January. Because the forces being used in the effort to crash the Moder line were "needed as reserve behind future defensive efforts", the Führer commanded on 25 January, according to captured documents, that the attack against the Lower Vosges and in Lower Alsace be suspended.

All Quiet on the VI Corps Front

The VI Corps sector now became quiet, and activities were routine and almost negligible until the 36th Division launched its attack on Oberhoffen and Drusenheim in the last hours of January. Contact was only scattered, but increased movement in enemy rear areas indicated a reshuffling of divisions. By the end of the month the 25th Panzer Grenadier, the 7th Parachute, and the 21st Panzer Divisions had been redeployed out of the area. The mounting demands for personnel on the eastern front and the losses sustained in the winter campaign in the west had left the German army incapable of further attack in Alsace. Average casualties for the Volks Grenadier divisions for the winter were 3,000 to 4,000 and for the Panzer and Panzer Grenadier divisions 2,000 to 3,000. After bringing up about 500 replacements for each Volks Grenadier division in January, the enemy could assemble only four to five complete Grenadier battalions for each division.

The only action taken by American forces prior to the attack of the 36th Division was the changing of sectors and effecting of reliefs.

Before the German attacks of 24-25 January, it had been planned to have the 101st Airborne Division relieve the 79th Division. The attacks interrupted that plan, and then it was decided to have the 101st Division relieve Task Force Linden, which had been attached to the 79th Division, instead. As early as 18 January it had been announced to Seventh Army Headquarters that the 101st Airborne Division was to begin movement on the next day from Third Army territory to the Seventh Army.



MAJOR GENERAL
MAXWELL D. TAYLOR
". . . attached to XV Corps . . ."

This division, equipped as an infantry division, was composed of the 502nd and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiments and the 327th Glider Infantry; it was commanded by Major General Maxwell D. Taylor. The 101st Airborne Division upon its arrival had been attached to XV Corps effective 20 January and by 25 January had begun movement to the VI Corps area for the relief of Task Force Linden.

The 222nd and 232nd Regiments moved out of the division and corps area to army reserve on 27 January; but General Brooks gave the 79th Division verbal authority to retain the 242nd Infantry in position so that the 314th Regiment which was to relieve it might have more time to reorganize after its efforts in the Ohlungen Forest. The next day the 314th Infantry relieved the 242nd going into the line between the other two regiments of the 79th Division. The 101st Airborne Division went into the line between the 103rd and 79th Divisions, occupying the sector between Niedermörsch and Schweighausen with the 327th Glider and 501st Parachute Regiments on line.

The next chapter will interrupt the narrative of Seventh Army operations to discuss in some detail the First French Army's successful campaign to eliminate the Colmar pocket. This operation involved many American troops and was, of course, intimately connected with and highly important to the future of Seventh Army.

CHAPTER XXIV

Elimination of the Colmar Pocket

Toward the end of January the difficulty of the German situation in the Ardennes, the failure of enemy attacks in Lorraine and northern Alsace, and the success of the Russian winter offensive indicated that the time had come for Allied forces to eliminate the Colmar Pocket, which had been reduced but little since its formation at the beginning of December. At the end of the old year principal efforts of the First French Army, like those of the American Seventh Army, had been directed toward defense against the anticipated German offensive. Even on 7 January Sixth Army Group had still insisted that defensive measures in the Vosges be "pressed forward with all energy." The defense was to be conducted along aggressive lines, characterized by frequent raids on all parts of the front to secure identifications and information and to create doubt as to the situation and intention of Allied forces. It was intended that these activities would facilitate rapid passage to a general offensive on that front.

General preparatory instructions for an attack by the First French Army had been given by Sixth Army Group on 15 January, ". . . launch without delay and by surprise, with all the means now at your disposal, powerful offensive operations converging in the direction of Brisach and aimed at total reduction of the Alsace bridgehead." At this time, however, the means were not yet sufficient to the end. On 11 January Seventh Army, concerned over the enemy build-up and thrust in the Strasbourg area, had sent an officer to the French II Corps to get first hand information on the situation. The officer sent back an urgent message that the corps had only scanty reserves and that the situation north of Rhinau could be considered serious.

During the period of defense and patrol activity on the rim of the Colmar Pocket the American 3rd Infantry Division remained in line as a part of II French Corps in the sector just northwest of Colmar. On 19 January the division was relieved from its positions by the American 28th Infantry Division. For the next three days units of the 3rd Division engaged in training preparatory to an attack launched on 22 January.

On 18 January Sixth Army Group had issued instructions to First French Army to attack from the north and south. This double envelopment strategy called for attack by the French I Corps in the south on 20 January and by the French II Corps in the north on 22 January. General Bethouart's I Corps was to direct its main effort so as to cut the road net in the Cernay-Guebwiller area and then to exploit in the direction of the bridges at Brisach. The II Corps, under command of General Goislard de Monsabert, was to attack in the north between Colmar and Selestat, by-passing Colmar to the northeast and east, and also exploiting in the direction of Brisach. These attacks of 20 and 22 January marked the transition from the stalemate to the elimination phase in Colmar Pocket operations.

A previous plan was to begin the offensive in the middle of February, employing the same strategy. But the innumerable streams and small rivers traversing the Alsatian Plain, where most of the fighting would take place, are generally at their lowest stage toward the end of January. Therefore it was imperative to begin operations as soon as possible, before the plain became a vast quagmire.

I Corps in the south by 3 February had overrun the industrial zone in the Mulhouse-Cernay-Ensisheim triangle and had driven as far north as Ensisheim. By 28 January II Corps, including American units, had reached its first objective, the junction of the Rhine-Rhone and Colmar Canals at Artzenheim. The Vosges sector was being held by the French 10th Infantry Division. On 29 January the American XXI Corps, assigned to the First French Army, was given that part of the II Corps mission which called for reaching the Brisach bridges on the Rhine and making a junction with I Corps in the south. Between 29 January and

1 February II Corps completed its remaining missions, clearing the Rhine Plain between Artzenheim and Erstein and occupying the Rhine in that area. Forces of I and XXI Corps made a junction at Rouffach on 5 February. By 6 February forces of XXI Corps had reached the Brisach objective, and after that until 9 February operations in the pocket were confined to mopping up. By 9 February all German resistance in the area had been liquidated; the First French Army was at the Rhine from Basel to a point north of Strasbourg.

Advance of I Corps

The breakthrough operation of I Corps was conceived as a "crushing attack in depth" to be opened on a narrow front by surprise. The 4th Moroccan Mountain Division on the west and the 2nd Moroccan Infantry Division on the east moved out on the axis of advance Cernay-Ensisheim, aimed at securing the crossings of the Ill River north of Ensisheim to enable armor to move toward the Brisach area. Just north and east of Mulhouse the 9th Colonial Infantry Division had the mission of pivoting and protecting the main effort by establishing itself along the Ill between Mulhouse and Ensisheim. All three divisions were reinforced by armor of the 1st Armored Division. The attack was launched as planned just before 0800 hours on 20 January.

After 11 days of fighting in the worst possible weather none of the corps objectives had been attained, although advances had been made. French infantry had "reached the limit of its resistance." Armor was reduced to half its original quantity, and the repair crews were exhausted. It was not possible to declare a total rest period, but no offensive action was undertaken on 31 January, and every opportunity was taken that day to give rest to all possible infantry troops and tank crews and to conserve ammunition.

Slight advances were made on 1 February against troops supported by powerful artillery fire and protected by extensive minefields. The next day, as the advance of the French I Corps continued, the American XXI Corps entered Colmar and Allied infantry reached the vicinity of the Brisach bridges. This made it all the more imperative

for I Corps to push more rapidly so as to hasten the crumbling of enemy resistance west of the Rhine.

At the end of 3 February I Corps troops had reached the outskirts of Ensisheim, the initial objective. Reconnaissance troops were sent to the Ill and Thur crossings at the outskirts of Ensisheim. The 2nd Moroccan Division eliminated resistance in the Nonnenbruch Woods up to the line of the Thur River. Though neither Cernay nor Ensisheim had been taken, the I Corps now had a base for the drive northward to make a junction with XXI Corps forces at Rouffach.

II Corps Crosses the Ill River

Three divisions, the American 3rd Infantry, the 5th French Armored, and the 1st Moroccan Infantry took direct part in the assault launched by the II French Corps between the forest south of Selestat and Ostheim north of Colmar on the night of 22-23 January. By 20 January the American 28th Infantry Division had relieved the 3rd



MAJOR GENERAL
NORMAN D. COTA
*"... holding the line from
Sigolsheim to Le Valtin ..."*







Division and was holding the line stretching from Sigolsheim southwest to Le Valtin, where it joined the French 10th Infantry Division, which was holding the Central Vosges sector on the I Corps north flank. The 28th Infantry Division, made up of the 109th, 110th, and 112th Infantry Regiments and commanded by Major General Norman D. Cota, had been attached to Seventh Army and placed under the operational control of the First French Army on 16 January. The 28th Division, "exhausted and depleted", had been heavily hit in the Ardennes sector and came to Seventh Army critically under strength. The rehabilitation of its troops, who began to arrive in the St.

Die area by 18 January, remained the responsibility of Twelfth Army Group. Protection to the north and east of II Corps assault divisions was given by the French 2nd Armored Division, holding the Rhine Plain

THE COLMAR POCKET

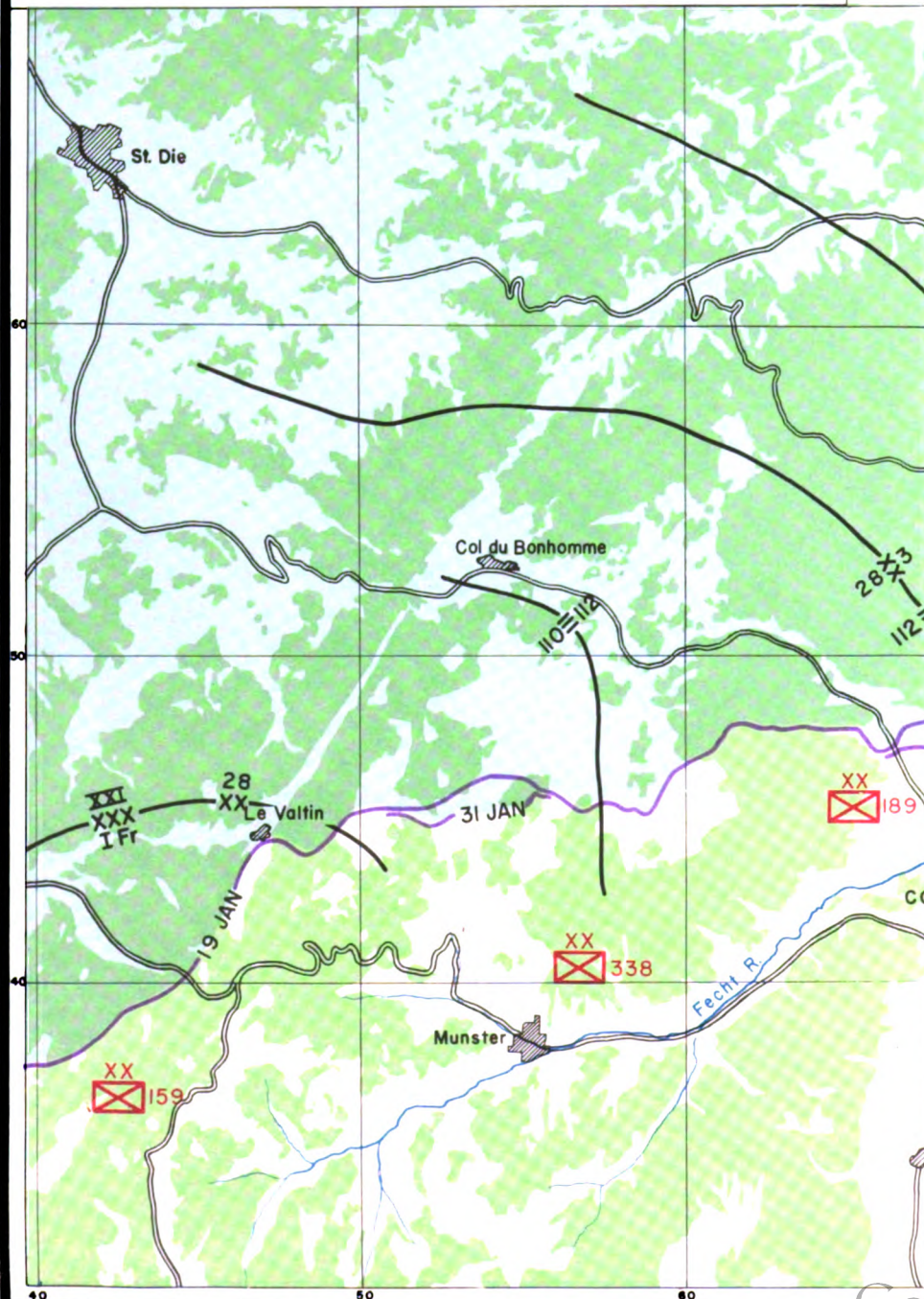
UNITS WITH ~~XXI~~ CORPS AND IIFR CORPS

LEGEND

	Roads		Woods
	Towns, Cities		Allied Situation
	Rivers, Canals		Phases of Advance

Enemy Shown in Red

Scale 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Miles



above Erstein and having a western boundary lying approximately on the main road running north from Colmar and through Selestat.

Opposing the II Corps the Germans had at their disposal the equivalent of 25 battalions each with a troop strength of about 500 men. These units were of varying character and quality. In general enemy troops were weary from months of severe fighting and partly demoralized by their defeats. But veteran soldiers with longer training maintained an aggressive spirit. The aged or foreign recruits were worth little but were capable of conducting an able defense with the veterans leading them. The only units still aggressive, in addition to companies of the Feldherrnhalle Panzer Brigade, were the training units for non-commissioned officers and the SS.

The mission of II Corps was to break through the enemy lines along the Ill River between Guemar and Ostheim, to reach out to the



MARCKOLSHEIM AREA

“ . . . The mission of II Corps was to break through enemy lines between Guemar and Ostheim . . . and to advance along the Rhine-Rhone Canal to Marckolsheim . . . ”

Colmar Canal, to turn northward at Artzenheim, and to advance along the Rhine-Rhone Canal to Marckolsheim. Masking its west flank by blocking the Fecht River Valley, the corps was then to drive toward Neuf-Brisach and southward to make junctions with I Corps at Rouffach,



INFANTRY TROOPS HEADING FOR NEW POSITIONS ON THE
COLMAR FRONT

" . . . During the night of 22-23 January . . . the 1st Moroccan Division and the American 3rd Division . . . jumped off between the Illwald and Ostheim to execute . . . Operation GRANDSLAM . . . "

Ensisheim, and Chalampe. The last step was to be the mopping up of the pocket between Marckolsheim and Erstein.

During the night of 22-23 January and the following morning the 1st Moroccan Division and the American 3rd Division, to which the 254th Infantry of Task Force Harris had been attached for operations throughout the month of January, jumped off between the Illwald and Ostheim to execute what was known to the Americans as Operation *Grandslam*. Between Selestat and Guemar the sector was being held

only by three low quality enemy battalions. Between 2100 hours on 22 January and 0230 hours on 23 January the 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments crossed the Fecht River on a footbridge at Guemar in a surprise move without supporting fires. The regiments fanned out across the Colmar Forest in order to cover the ground before the Ill and be ready to strike at the river crossings.

The American 7th Infantry, to the southwest, wheeled to the south and moved between the Fecht and the Ill to cover the flank of the 30th Infantry. The 1st Battalion made contact with the enemy at Ostheim, the eastern section of which it was to clear, early in the morning. The 3rd Battalion occupied the Brunnwald as well as the southern edge of the Colmar Forest, with infantry supported by tanks. The 30th Infantry had made its way during the night toward the river, and by morning the 1st Battalion had crossed the Ill and a small stream just to the east of it on improvised footbridges of rubber boats and was proceeding southward toward Maison Rouge. The 3rd Battalion went through the forest to its southeastern edge, adjacent to the Maison Rouge crossing of the Ill. Both regiments encountered scattered strongpoints, mines, and wire obstacles, and small arms, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. The advance was made in weather which was quite cold and over terrain covered with snow. While the losses from enemy action were not negligible, the enemy resistance was spotty and caused no great delay in the advance of the regiments.

The rest of the II Corps drive started on the morning of 23 January. Elements of the 1st Moroccan Division reached the Ill at dawn and made crossings between Illhaeusean and the Illwald, to the north of the American crossings. Patrols advanced eastward. They reported numerous plastic mines along the entire strip of occupied terrain, particularly along woods and paths, which were covered with ice and a thick layer of snow. An 18-ton bridge, found intact at Illhaeusean, allowed crossings of infantry combat vehicles. It was not, apparently, until after three days of confused fighting that French troops completely held Illhaeusean.

At 0400 hours on 23 January the 1st Battalion of the American 7th Infantry had received orders to enter the eastern or enemy half of

Ostheim. After combating enemy tanks with bazookas and being joined by friendly armor and tank destroyers, troops mopped up the remaining resistance. Ostheim was completely in American hands by the end of 23 January. The 2nd Battalion moved to the outskirts of Ostheim and drove the enemy out of the woods near the village.

The 30th Regiment executed a pincer attack on the Maison Rouge crossings over the Ill and a stream about 400 yards east during the morning of 23 January. The 1st Battalion, which completed crossings of both streams about 1,000 yards north of Maison Rouge during the early morning moved toward the south. The 3rd Battalion launched an attack on the Ill crossing after an artillery preparation and occupied it, taking the bridge intact. Both crossings were in American hands by noon. Assuming that supporting armor would soon be able to follow over the Maison Rouge bridges, the regiment deployed all three of its battalions across the river, the 1st Battalion going through Riedwihr Wood for an attack on Riedwihr, the 3rd passing south through Riedwihr Wood, and the 2nd Battalion moving up as reserve.

Against this rapid extension of the bridgehead toward the Colmar Canal the enemy launched a heavy attack with tank-supported infantry striking from the east, south, and north. This tank attack struck at a most unfortunate time. Elements of the 1st Battalion were on the way to Riedwihr, out in the open, in no position for a defensive stand. The 3rd Battalion was entering Hohtzwihr, just beginning to get set up. Troops of the 2nd Battalion had just arrived in Riedwihr Wood, when the full force of the enemy blow was being felt, at about 1800 hours. The bridge over the Ill collapsed under the first tank to attempt to cross, making it impossible to supply the desperate need for armor. The regiment could only withdraw the greater part of its troops from the costly engagements and form defensive lines to the west of the Ill in the Colmar Forest. Meanwhile to the southwest elements of the 254th Infantry attached to the 3rd Division engaged in inconclusive action against the enemy near Sigolsheim just above Colmar.

The next day the drive to establish the Franco-American bridgehead east of the Ill continued. Combat Command V of the 2nd French Armored Division was assigned to the 1st Moroccan Division,

while the 5th French Armored Division received orders to hold itself in readiness to advance as quickly as possible along an axis from Ill-haeusern to Neuf-Brisach. French troops launched an attack in the direction of Elsenheim. Reconnaissance elements of Combat Command V attempted to advance along the Elsenheim road. Immediately the enemy counterattacked and revealed heavy tanks concealed in the southern edge of the Elsenheim Wood. The platoon of armor withdrew.

After the German counterattack broke the advance of the 30th Infantry near Riedwihr, the regiment fell back to Guemar and Ostheim to be refitted and reorganized. Its mission then fell to the 15th Infantry, which had been in reserve in the Colmar Forest. At 2030 hours on 23 January the Division Commander, General O'Daniel, sent the following order to the Regimental Commander:

Make plans to take over 30th Infantry attack with same objectives . . . plan now is to hold bridgehead and line along L'Ill River. We will get bridge that tank fell thru back in, send armor across and attack again.

The 30th Infantry had been able to keep only a portion of one battalion east of the Ill in a command post position north of Maison Rouge. The 15th Regiment sent Companies I and K across the footbridge north of Maison Rouge early in the morning of 24 January. By daylight the two companies had moved into positions including the two stream crossings at Maison Rouge. Company I had encountered remnants of the 1st Battalion of the 30th Infantry on its way into position. Company K had encountered light German resistance, but for the most part the enemy had withdrawn from the crossing sites.

At 0800 hours enemy armor started to roll out of Riedwihr Woods; and another counterattack was on, armor supported by infantry. American armor crossed a Bailey bridge completed at 0730 hours at the footbridge site to the north but did not arrive at Maison Rouge before the German counterattack. Heavy German fire knocked out the American armor, and finally only a handful of men remained in and around the clump of buildings at Maison Rouge. American artillery concentrations were laid down against a series of German counterattacks, all of which were broken. Meanwhile the 7th Infantry, which had cleared Ostheim

on 23 January, moved directly south along both sides of the main highway to Colmar against heavy enemy resistance and counterattacks. On 25 January the regiment had executed battalion pincer movements and had seized Houssen half way between Ostheim and Colmar. The



KNOCKED OUT AMERICAN TANKS. COLMAR FOREST IN BACKGROUND

" . . . Heavy German fire knocked out the American armor, and finally only a handful of men remained in and around . . . Maison Rouge . . . "

regiment spent the next day repelling small counterattacks and solidifying the positions in its salient. On the same day the 15th Infantry and French armor pushed forward in the Maison Rouge bridgehead area. The 3rd Battalion moved east from Maison Rouge, while the 1st and 2nd Battalions moved to the south and east in Riedwihr Wood. To the north the French made some progress into the Eisenheim Woods, but French armor was stopped by fire from enemy tanks.

On 26 January the 28th Division zone was extended eastward to the Ill, occupying the area in which the 254th Infantry had been

fighting. The 254th Infantry had assembled in the Colmar Forest and moved out to attack Jepsheim and then push on to sieze the Colmar Canal up to its junction with the Rhine-Rhone Canal. Jepsheim, a strongpoint in the German defense of the Rhine crossings, was strongly



PILLBOX IN JEBSHEIM

" . . . Jepsheim, a strongpoint in the German defense of the Rhine crossings, was strongly organized for defense and stubbornly defended . . . "

organized for defense and stubbornly defended. At 0245 hours on 26 January four battalions of artillery threw preparatory fire on the town, and immediately afterward the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 254th Infantry launched their attack. Resistance was so strong that by 0430 hours both battalions found it necessary to withdraw to defensive positions. Since heavy fire from the Jepsheim Wood had been largely instrumental in repelling the attack, the 3rd Battalion was sent through Riedwihr, which had been taken late the previous day by the 3rd Battalion of the 15th Infantry, to clear out enemy opposition. It took the battalion

until the night of 27 January to reach its objective. In the meantime the other two battalions returned to the attack on the town. At 2400 hours on 26 January the concentrated fire of eight field artillery battalions had been laid on Jepsheim for 15 minutes. An hour later four companies were in the town, and during the next three days cleared the enemy out of Jepsheim.

On 26 January the 1st Moroccan Division had been given the mission of opening the Illhaeusern-Jepsheim route without aid from the 5th Armored Division, which was to hold itself ready to strike out in the



COLMAR PLAIN LITTERED WITH ENEMY AND ALLIED ARMOR

" . . . The French forces reorganized during the night, made only slight advances the next day, and stopped a severe counterattack by enemy infantry and tanks . . . "

direction of Brisach. The Eisenheim road and forest were not cleared until 27 January. That evening tanks and infantry moved down the road toward Jepsheim. At midnight an enemy counterattack was repulsed with heavy losses. The French forces reorganized during the

night, made only slight advances the next day, and stopped a severe counterattack by enemy infantry and tanks at the exit from Eisenheim by protective fires and by corps artillery. French losses were severe in this action.

On 27 January the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 30th Infantry had passed through positions of the 15th Infantry in the southern part of Riedwihr Woods in attack with a combat command of French armor to get control of the crossings over the Colmar Canal between the Ill River and Muntzenheim. This had been the regimental objective when it first crossed the Ill early on 23 January. By the next morning two small villages between Riedwihr and the Colmar Canal had been cleared and defensive positions at canal crossings south of the towns had been established. At 1620 hours on 27 January Company L moved out to sweep the area north and east of the junction of the Ill River and the Colmar Canal. At 2000 hours the company reached its objective at the junction of the river and canal and then moved back to its battalion blocking position in Riedwihr.

When the American XXI Corps was inserted between I and II French Corps, the II Corps had not quite reached the line of army objective No. 1, which called for clearing the area north of the Colmar Canal, west of the Rhone-Rhine Canal, at least as far north as the line Marckolsheim-Illhaeusern. But the bridgehead across the Ill was nonetheless substantial. The only difficulty was that it had not been extended eastward beyond the Eisenheim-Jebsheim line.

XXI Corps Enters the Pocket

The exhausting and stubborn character of the winter fighting in the Colmar Pocket had caused the infantry strength of the First French Army to run lower and lower. When losses continued high in the fighting of 20-21 January, General de Lattre sent a telegraphic demand to General Devers that he intervene with the Supreme Commander for a supplementary infantry division. On 22 January he gave forceful reiteration to the demand. By 24 January Sixth Army Group estimated that its shortages of infantry riflemen replacements would be 13,320 by

February. SHAEF was requested to reconsider its allocation of replacements. To bolster the troop strength of Sixth Army Group forces for the Colmar offensive SHAEF transferred five American divisions to the Seventh Army and later attached approximately 12,000 service troops for the support of the new divisions.



**GENERAL DE LATTRE
DE TASSIGNY**
*"... commanding First
French Army ..."*

Accordingly, to strengthen the First French Army effort Sixth Army Group informed Seventh Army at 2230 hours on 24 January that XXI Corps would take over a part of the First French Army sector and would command the 3rd, 28th, and 75th American Infantry Divisions, that General Milburn, Commanding XXI Corps, was to report to the Commanding General, First French Army, at 1000 hours, 25 January.

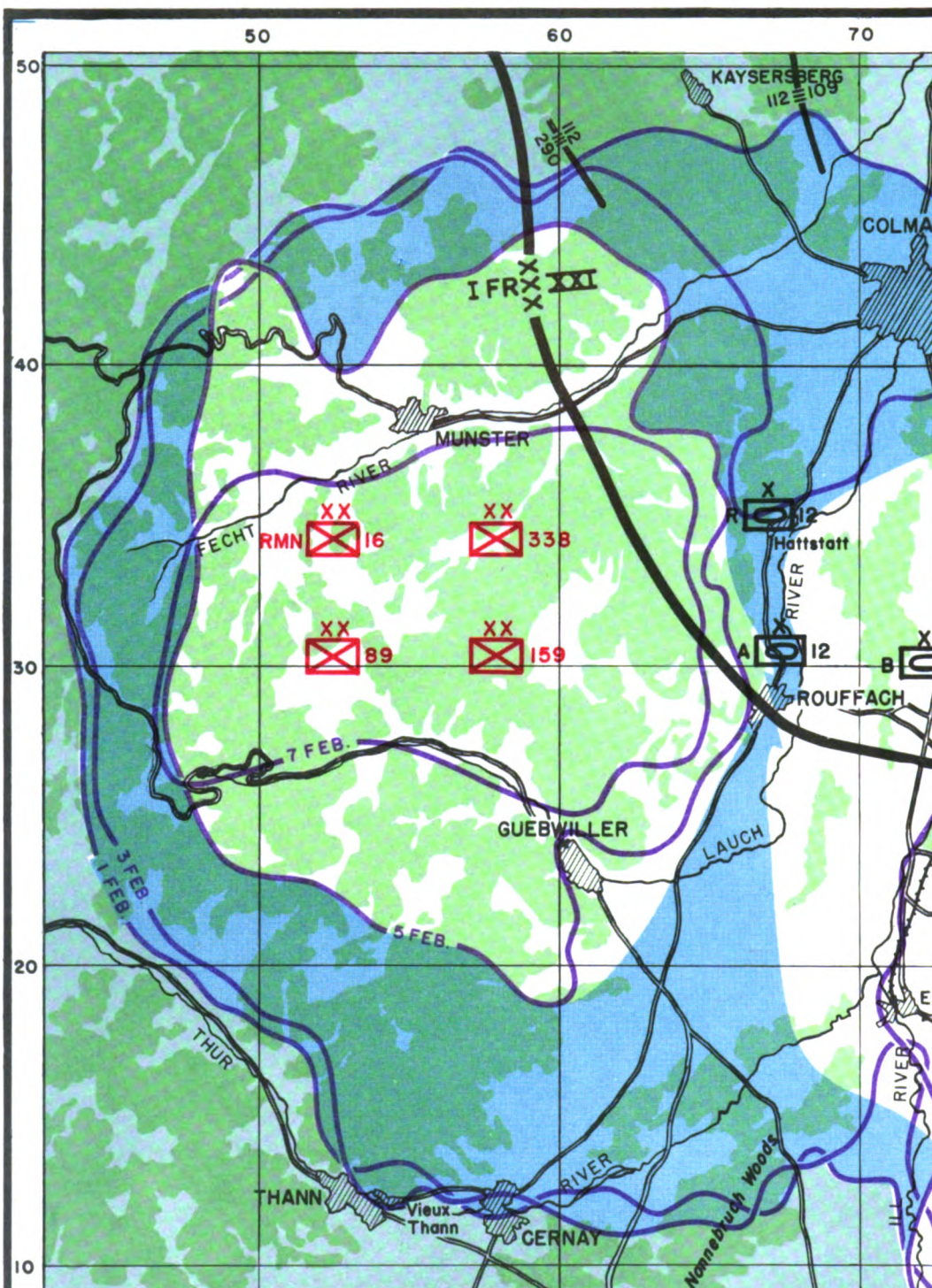
The 75th Infantry Division, made up of the 289th, 290th, and 291st Regiments and recently placed under the command of Major General Ray E. Porter, had been ordered from the Ardennes sector, where it had been heavily engaged, to start for the Seventh Army area on 25 January.



**MAJOR GENERAL
RAY E. PORTER**
*"... ordered from the
Ardennes sector ..."*

In a conference held the night of 26 January at 3rd Division Headquarters in Ribeauville, General De Lattre issued instructions to his corps and division commanders; and plans were made and orders issued for the attack in the new XXI Corps zone. The mission of the XXI Corps was to attack in the direction of Brisach, seize Neuf-Brisach and the western approaches to Alt-Brisach across the Rhine, and to maintain contact in the Vosges and contain the enemy

there. In case enemy withdrawal in the Vosges area was indicated,



THE COLMAR POCKET SOUTHERN FRONT

LEGEND

- Phase lines as of 2400
- Advance as of the morning of the fifth
- Enemy situation shown in red

Scale

MILES 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

70

the corps was to follow closely and mop up the Fecht Valley. Corps had at its disposal the 5th French Armored Division in addition to the three American infantry divisions already mentioned.

The XXI Corps task of exploiting toward Brisach had been the main mission of II French Corps. Under the new orders the scheduled junction with I Corps would be made by XXI Corps. This left II Corps free to continue its attack on the axis from Guemar to Marckolsheim to the Rhine, then to clean up the region between the Ill and the Rhine Rivers and between Erstein and Marckolsheim. The II Corps operation served as cover for the XXI Corps left flank.

In the sector it took over at 2100 hours on 28 January XXI Corps opened the attack toward Neuf-Brisach exactly one day later. The 3rd Division was to continue its drive, crossing the Colmar Canal, which it had just reached. The 28th Division, continuing to hold west of the Ill, was to mount a "strong demonstration" and maintain strong pressure in conjunction with the 3rd Division attack. It was further directed to fix the enemy by small local attacks, aggressive patrolling, and strong raids. Any enemy withdrawal was to be followed up vigorously. The 5th French Armored Division was to attack in multiple columns on corps order. Continuing its movement into position for offensive action, the 75th Division was to have one Regimental Combat Team in a forward assembly area by noon on 30 January and the other two were to be moved up by 0700 hours on 31 January. The XII Tactical Air Command was to give maximum bombing effort on Brisach and the bridges east of Brisach and attack enemy communications, depots, and assembly points east of the Rhine.

Two regiments, the 7th and 15th, attacked abreast when the 3rd Division crossed the Colmar Canal between Colmar and Artzenheim. Both regiments encountered little resistance in the canal crossing, corps artillery laying down a heavy barrage that rolled southward from the canal's southern edge. The 7th Infantry had two battalions, the 1st and 3rd, assembled south of the canal an hour after the jump-off at 2100 hours on 29 January. Because bridging supplies were held up by traffic congestion, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 15th Infantry did not complete their crossing until 2400 hours. Tank support did not arrive

for the advance until a Bailey bridge was completed the next morning. The two regiments made good progress south of the canal, smashing one enemy counterattack during the morning of 30 January. The 15th Infantry cleared Muntzenheim during the night, as both regiments drove the enemy out of villages on the Colmar-Muntzenheim highway.

The following night the 289th Infantry Regiment of the 75th Division took over the positions of the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 7th Infantry. Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion had opened a drive against Horbourg on the outskirts of Colmar and straddling the German escape route from Colmar to Neuf-Brisach. Troops were pinned down by anti-



SMOKE SCREEN BEING LAID IN THE COLMAR AREA

"... Both regiments encountered little resistance in the canal crossing, corps artillery laying down a heavy barrage . . ."

tank, machine gun, and small arms fire. German resistance did not break until French tanks pushed through enemy positions. When elements of the 289th Regiment relieved the battalion at 2300 hours on 31 January, the town was clear; but German artillery was still pounding it.

On the morning of 30 January the 1st Battalion of the 254th Infantry attacked with French armor from Jepsheim toward the junction of the Colmar and Rhine-Rhone Canals. A strong counterattack forced the battalion back to its line of departure. On 1 February the 2nd Battalion passed through 1st Battalion positions and advanced slowly against strong resistance, reaching the Rhine-Rhone Canal north of its junction with the Colmar Canal.

On the extreme west of the corps sector the 28th Division, which had been holding the Vosges line and probing enemy territory with long and aggressive patrols, attacked south at 2100 hours on 1



**M-4 TANKS MOUNTING 105MM HOWITZERS BEING USED AS ARTILLERY
IN THE COLMAR AREA**

"... the 109th Infantry, cutting through increasingly strong resistance, had arrived at the entrance to Colmar ..."

February with the 112th and 109th Infantry Regiments abreast. The zone of the 112th was just west of Colmar, but the city of Colmar lay directly in the path of the 109th. By the next morning the 109th Infan-

try, cutting through increasingly strong resistance, had arrived at the entrance to Colmar. Here American troops stopped their advance and allowed the tanks of the 5th French Armored Division to have the privilege of being the first to enter the city. After entering the city amid the "delirious enthusiasm" of the Alsatians, the French tanks split into three groups. One went through the city and west to block the valley of the Fecht. Another went on to the south of Colmar without stopping. The third set itself to cleaning out resistance in the city until American infantry moved in and took over the job.

To the east the 75th Division attacked at 0700 hours on 1 February through the positions it had taken over from the 3rd Division. By the end of 2 February the 289th and 291st Infantry Regiments, progressing southward abreast, had taken Andolsheim and moved up on the approaches to Neuf-Brisach. A strong enemy counterattack, supported by armor, halted the advance.

By the evening of 1 February the 15th and 30th Regiments, working with French armor, had pushed south along the west bank of the Rhine-Rhone Canal to a point just north of Neuf-Brisach. The taking of Artzenheim at 1630 hours on 1 February by the French facilitated the progress of the 3rd Division. The 7th Infantry was able to pass through the French troops in Artzenheim and attack southward between the Rhine River and the Rhine-Rhone Canal on 2 February. Having moved rapidly with tank support the 2nd and 3rd Battalions had moved up to attack Biesheim by the next morning. The 3rd Battalion advanced between the canal and the highway and met determined opposition after elements had passed unknowingly through enemy outposts. The 2nd Battalion advanced on Biesheim from east of the highway. In the town Germans defended houses with rifles, machine guns, and bazookas. Troops of the 7th Infantry cleared Biesheim by the end of the day, but enemy entrenched in positions northeast of town were not completely eliminated until the morning of 4 February. With 3rd Division troops in Biesheim northeast of Neuf-Brisach, and the 75th Division approaching from the northwest the stage was set for the last drive on Neuf-Brisach.

After the fall of Colmar to the XXI Corps it was decided to push with all possible speed on the Colmar-Rouffach road to join with

I Corps. The American 12th Armored Division, which had been attached to II Corps primarily for its use in the Strasbourg area, was brought to the XXI Corps to attack south through the 28th Division, which was continuing the mop-up of Colmar on 3 February. French armor had blocked the Vosges to the west and south of Colmar. Combat Command B of the 12th Armored Division attempted to move southeast from Colmar along the road to Ensisheim, striking with Task Forces Fields, Norton, and Boone on the morning of 3 February. Task Force Fields was stopped at the edge of Colmar by enemy fire on its first attack at 0930 hours but later both Task Forces Fields and Norton seized bridge-



STE. CROIX EN PLAINE AREA

" . . . Task Forces Fields and Norton seized bridgeheads over the Ill River on the roads to Sundhoffen in the east and Ste. Croix en Plaine in the south . . . "

heads over the Ill River on the roads to Sundhoffen in the east and Ste. Croix en Plaine in the south. Task Force Boone attempted to push through Task Force Norton toward Sundhoffen but was held about 800 yards beyond the line of departure. The task forces held their positions

in the woods during the night, screened by reconnaissance elements. During the night 4-5 February these three task forces were relieved by elements of the 109th Infantry and then dissolved.

On 3 February Combat Command R of the 12th Armored had attacked southward astride the Colmar-Rouffach road, while the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion was sent to relieve the French west of the highway. During the morning of 4 February Combat Command R was stopped by antitank fire from a town just northeast of Hattstatt and east of the Colmar-Rouffach road. At 1030 hours infantry troops with artillery support launched an attack but were repulsed. The next day elements of the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion together with the 1st Battalion of the 110th Infantry Regiment and the 23rd Tank Battalion broke down enemy resistance. Meanwhile Combat Command A had driven south through Hattstatt.

Split into two Task Forces, Doc and Scott, Combat Command A with Troop A of the 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron had seized Hattstatt on 4 February. In accordance with orders issued the night before, Troop A moved out from Hattstatt at 0200 hours on 5 February toward Rouffach. The two task force components of Combat Command A followed closely the cavalry unit. Twice a platoon of the reconnaissance troop detached itself from the advance to contain enemy forces discovered and by-passed on the road to Rouffach.

Numerous enemy horse-drawn transports were destroyed during the movement and enemy resistance overrun. Infantry elements of Task Force Scott passed through roadblocks and entered Rouffach at 0512 hours on 5 February. Other infantry troops moved around the town to seal off the exits and to contact French forces which had reached the town during the night. By 0800 hours French and American leaders had met and coordinated defense plans. The Colmar Pocket had been cut in two.

French I and II Corps Continue the Advance

When I Corps had established itself on the southern bank of the Thur River between Ensisheim and Cernay, though not including those two places, it received orders from General de Lattre to move

northward as soon as possible to make contact with XXI Corps. Accordingly, on 3 February the divisions in the corps were given their directions of operation: the 2nd Moroccan Division to go toward Rouffach and Ste. Croix en Plaine, the 1st French Armored Division to move on the Ensisheim-Ste. Croix en Plaine axis as a unit; and the 4th Mountain Division and the 9th Colonial Division were to capture Cernay and Ensisheim, respectively. It was hoped to cut off the retreat of the enemy from west of the Ill. As early as 31 January enemy displacement in the Vosges had been reported.

On 4 February the French found Cernay abandoned by the enemy and moving northeast along the Rouffach road without serious opposition, occupied Guebwiller west of the highway by the end of the day. Elements of the 4th Moroccan Spahi Regiment, supported by infantry, went on to reach the southern edges of Rouffach during the night. They were stopped by German armor.

When Task Force Scott of Combat Command A of the 12th Armored Division arrived at the north edge of Rouffach the next morning, civilian information indicated that the French were at the south edge of town but not in strong enough force to enter or to stop the enemy from escaping to the east. Liaison was established with the French during the morning. Troops of I Corps had been awaiting the arrival of the Americans. Tanks started through the town, and soon the first link-up between the I Corps and XXI Corps had been made.

On the rest of the I Corps front a general advance had been resumed on the morning of 4 February. The French 1st Armored Division made rapid advances northward during 5 February, sending a small element ahead without opposition into the XXI Corps zone as far as Ste. Croix en Plaine, which was reached at about 1100 hours and found unoccupied. Upon the request of the 12th Armored Division the detachment retired from the village and then took numerous prisoners while patrolling in the woods northeast of Rouffach. Also established along the Ill from Ensisheim north were the 9th Colonial Division and the 2nd Moroccan Division.

When the XXI Corps was inserted between the French I and II Corps, it became the mission of II Corps to push east toward the Rhine-

Rhone Canal and to clear up the residual pocket from Erstein to Marckolsheim. On 29 January the enemy had launched a counterattack on Elsenheim, which was beaten off. There were also attacks by German planes east and north of Elsenheim. On 30 January the 1st Moroccan Division resumed its forward movement and succeeded in clearing up woodland areas east of Illhaeusern. Everywhere in the sector it appeared that the enemy was withdrawing the main body of his troops, leaving in contact only a system of outposts which were fairly powerful and very active. Since the enemy appeared to be pulling out all along the front, the order was given to maintain contact during the night, pushing forward if necessary.

Operations had begun to take on the character of simple patrolling and terrain occupation by 31 January, when the enemy had given up the hopeless struggle in the II Corps area. Elsenheim and the sector north along the Rhone-Rhine Canal were occupied by evening. In the pocket farther north the 2nd French Armored Division, out of contact with the enemy, was retarded only by snow and mine-clearing, as it reached out east of Selestat during the day.

The II Corps advanced on 1 February to the Rhine, which it occupied along its entire front. The taking of Artzenheim at 1630 hours gave the 7th Infantry a base for its drive southward toward Neuf-Brisach. The northern flank of the XXI Corps had been secured, and the Germans were being driven out of Alsace south of Strasbourg and back to Germany.

XXI Corps Finishes its Task

By the time the junction between XXI Corps and I Corps had taken place at Rouffach, resistance in the XXI Corps area had become generally disorganized. It remained only for the 3rd, 28th, and 75th Divisions to push forward in their zones to the Rhine, overcoming isolated pockets of resistance as they went. On 6 February elements of the 12th Armored Division prepared to exploit to the east after bridges had been constructed over the Ill for the crossing by the 28th Division. But resistance was so light that the mission of the 12th Armored Division

was changed to blocking the Vosges from west of Colmar to Rouffach to keep the enemy from escaping to the east.

The 3rd Division continued its drive southward between the Rhone-Rhine Canal and the Rhine River. As the 7th Infantry cleared



**AMERICAN MEDIUM TANK OUTPOSTED ALONG BANKS
OF THE ILL RIVER**

"... the 12th Armored Division prepared to exploit to the east after bridges had been constructed over the Ill . . ."

Biesheim, the 15th and the 30th Regiments cleared away resistance on its flanks. By the morning of 6 February, the 7th Infantry had completely sealed off Neuf-Brisach, and the 15th Infantry had mopped up along the river to the east. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 30th Regiment had attacked south through the 7th during the night of 5-6 February. The 1st Battalion had stayed in a blocking position north of Neuf-Brisach.

Patrols from the 1st Battalion of the 30th Infantry reconnoitered Neuf-Brisach during the night and early morning and en-

countered only scattered enemy. At about 0930 hours on 6 February a platoon moved south along the Rhine-Rhone Canal. As the platoon neared a railroad bridge, soldiers encountered a civilian, who was persuaded to jump into the dry moat and lead the group through a low ceilinged, 60-foot tunnel into the fortress city. Only 76 enemy were found in the town, which was declared clear at 1115 hours. Prisoners said their officers had exhorted them to resist to the last man on the previous evening. The officers had then departed.

As the 3rd Division completed the occupation of its zone, which extended to a point just south of Neuf-Brisach, the American 28th and 75th Divisions were taking care of the rest of the XXI Corps sector. The 75th Division, moving south and east, was on the line of the Rhone-Rhine Canal on 6 February. The 28th Division, having passed through the 12th Armored Division after its drive to Rouffach and having crossed the Ill with help of the armor, moved directly east and was on the southern flank of the corps boundary on 6 February. The two divisions advanced abreast and were on the Rhine from Balgau northward at the end of 7 February. After scattered mopping-up operations on 8 February the corps had complete control of all the territory assigned to it.

By that time the French I Corps to the south had virtually completed its elimination of German troops remaining in the Colmar Pocket area. In the Vosges the 4th Mountain Division had reduced the last organized enemy resistance by the close of 6 February. During 8 February troops of I Corps, supported by armor and advancing against only "delaying elements" and obstacles, had pushed the few Germans left in southern Alsace into a very small pocket at Chalampe. The next morning the last vestige of enemy strength west of the Rhine was gone. By that time the Germans had blown the Chalampe bridge across the Rhine.

Impact on the Enemy

The German withdrawal from the Colmar Pocket had been characterized by early high level indecision and by the ever-present primary mission of tying down as many Allied troops as possible. Documents indicate that the German Commander-in-Chief West had been

empowered on 27 January "to withdraw the weakly held Ill front to a straight line between the Ill and the Rhine, and beyond the Rhine as soon as defenses had been erected." Ferry service over the Rhine was planned to augment the traffic flowing over the bridge at Brisach. Construction of a cable track was to be considered. The next day it was announced that three heavy and two light cable tracks over the Rhine were available and that additional equipment was allotted. But although the Fuehrer approved the "withdrawal of the right wing of the Nineteenth Army", he directed the Commander-in-Chief West to "examine how far the front of the Nineteenth Army could be bettered by pressing forward the main line of resistance along the axis Selestat-Col du Bonhomme-Le Valtin" and the employment of the 6th SS Mountain Division for that purpose.

On 29 January the Commander-in-Chief West indicated it was impracticable to mount an attack for the purpose of advancing the main line of resistance of the Nineteenth Army. The 6th SS Mountain Division could not be released from the First Army "in view of the large-scale attack expected against the Moselle Gap." It was doubtful whether the 2nd Mountain Division, then in position for the assault, was still capable of attack. It was more important to strengthen the army bridgehead on its present front. To that end an order was issued the following day that it was essential to keep the bridgehead active and "to pin down enemy forces."

Late on 31 January the German Commander described the "tense situation" in the bridgehead, reporting that the enemy was only five miles from the bridge at Brisach and that the maximum width of the bridgehead was less than 25 miles. He inquired whether it was necessary to maintain the bridgehead for a protracted time and whether the Nineteenth Army was not in danger of being cut off. The dilemma facing the German commanders was that both First and Nineteenth Armies were understrength for the tasks facing them. The First was expecting a large-scale American attack on the Moselle front. Since the Nineteenth's bridgehead was nearly wiped out, the Commander-in-Chief West was suggesting that forces be withdrawn altogether from Alsace to help the German First Army ward off the anticipated attack.

The Fuehrer, after receiving a report from the "Chief of the Army High Command" on 1 February, refused to sanction the evacuation of the bridgehead. Formations still in the pocket were to be deployed against attacks in the Colmar and Cernay-Mulhouse sectors, and the Vosges sector was to be only lightly held. The Fuehrer required a report showing the actual strength of the Nineteenth Army and a map indicating the protecting forces on the east bank of the Rhine.

On the next day, 2 February, while evacuation was being discussed, came the news that the Allies had entered Colmar. High Command West reported that the destruction of its army was inevitable, if it were left west of the Rhine. If this happened, the forces necessary to build an adequate defense line on the east side of the Rhine would be lacking. The Vosges bulge had been weakened to such a degree in favor of the Colmar front that it resembled only an advanced position, which would be crushed by the Allies. A breakthrough at Colmar was considered probable, and there were no available reinforcements. The Chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff agreed with this estimate of the situation but declared that in any case the primary army mission was to establish defense at the point of penetration. In answer to a renewed request for an immediate decision on evacuation of the bridgehead, the same operations chief declared that withdrawal of all forces, including artillery, from the Vosges front had already begun anyway.

Finally, on 3 February High Command West was given permission to evacuate the bridgehead. As many of the Allied forces as possible would be tied down west of the Rhine in the process. The flanks were to be strengthened at the expense of the forward bulge; however, the outposts in the Vosges were to leave their positions only in case of enemy attack. The German 708th Infantry Division had already begun to fall back across the river, while the 16th and 189th Volks Grenadier and 198th Infantry Division were beginning to lose organic cohesion. North of Mulhouse the few remaining troops of three divisions were battling to hold the line. On 8 February High Command West reported that the bridgehead "did not hinder enemy operations any longer."

The German Nineteenth Army had consisted of the LXIV Corps and the LXIII Corps. By 10 February over 22,000 permanent

casualties could be charged against the Nineteenth Army as well as the loss of 55 armored vehicles and 66 artillery pieces. It is estimated that no more than 3,000 to 4,000 combat infantry effectives were successfully



**INFANTRY AND TANKS MOVING UP IN THE
COLMAR — MULHOUSE AREA**

" . . . North of Mulhouse the few remaining troops of three enemy divisions were battling to hold the line . . . "

evacuated and only a slightly higher figure for supporting arms and service troops.

In the German LXIV Corps were the 2nd Mountain Division, the 189th Infantry Division, the 189th, 708th and 16th Volks Grenadier Divisions. The 2nd Mountain Division was hard hit, having lost over 4,700 men in prisoners and over 1,000 other casualties during commitment in the Vosges. Predominantly Austrian personnel gave a poor account of themselves in battle and had a high rate of desertion. Fighting well and engaged heavily to the end, the 198th Infantry Division had 1,000 prisoners taken and may have managed to rescue 500 of its effec-

tives. Of the three Volks Grenadier divisions the 189th fared the worst. It was mauled badly in the defense of Colmar. A captured order set phases of withdrawal for the period 4-7 February. Attached to the 16th Volks Grenadier Division were assorted regiments and battalions, most of which managed to extricate themselves; but not more than 400 of the organic combat infantry got across the Rhine. The 708th Division was not in contact and was believed to have pulled back across the river on 3 February.

The LXIII Corps had fought in the south sector. Its 338th Infantry Division managed to pull the bulk of its units from the Vosges area. But one regiment suffered heavy casualties south of Colmar and another in the Ill-Thur triangle. The third was mauled during a hasty retreat. Not more than 400 combat men got away, and 1,750 prisoners were taken. The 159th Volks Grenadier Division finally abandoned Cernay after a stubborn fight that cost an estimated 800 killed or permanently disabled and 1,200 prisoners. The 716th Division lost at least 426 dead in its determined defense north of Mulhouse and had 800 prisoners taken.

The German Nineteenth Army was virtually destroyed as an effective fighting force as a result of the elimination of the Colmar Pocket; but the Commander-in-Chief West, desperately in need of men, deployed the main body of the salvaged forces presumably along the east bank of the Rhine opposite the former Colmar Pocket. Other elements were absorbed into divisions needing replacements. The 2nd Mountain Division and the 338th Division were transferred as quickly as possible behind the German First Army to give relief to other divisions facing the Seventh Army on the northern front. Seventh Army was now free to give its full attention to the elimination of German gains in northern Alsace.

CHAPTER XXV

Transition to Seventh Army Offensive

After the enemy had failed in his attack across the Moder River on 25 January, Seventh Army regained the initiative and held it throughout the campaign. The Army role during the reduction of the Colmar Pocket had been relatively a static one — that of securing the Sixth Army Group's northern flank. It now remained for Seventh Army to straighten its front and ensure a clean line of departure for future offensive operation.

VI Corps on the Moder River Line

As January came to an end, the 36th Division was primed for an attack to clear the area south of the line Oberhoffen-Drusenheim and east to the Rhine. Plans were made on the basis of a Corps Operation Instruction issued on 26 January, and the 142nd Regiment was scheduled to open the attack with an assault on Oberhoffen the night of 30-31 January. On the morning of 30 January, however, the launching of the attack was postponed for 24 hours when a sudden thaw made the ground too soft for heavy support. Although it appeared that the attack might be postponed indefinitely, word arrived at noon of 31 January that operations would start that evening. In front of the other two regiments heavy patrols attempted to determine the extent of enemy withdrawal from the Offendorf-Herrlisheim-Rohrwiller-Drusenheim area. Although the enemy had pulled out of Gambsheim, which French forces had entered, patrols just to the north of the town drew heavy small arms fire, and air observation reported a heavy concentration of hostile troops remaining in Offendorf.

When the 2nd Battalion of the 142nd Regiment attacked at 2100 hours on 31 January, the front of the 36th Division extended from the southern portion of Oberhoffen to Weyersheim. The line was being held, from south to north, by the 142nd and 141st Infantry Regiments and the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. Attached to the division were the 36th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and Combat Command B of the 14th Armored Division. The plan of attack was for the 2nd Battalion of the 142nd Infantry to capture Oberhoffen during the night. Then the 1st and 3rd Battalions were to swing simultaneously to the east from Oberhoffen and Bischwiller to take Drusenheim. Elements of Combat Command B were to assume the defense of Oberhoffen and allow the 2nd Battalion to pass into reserve.

The companies of the 2nd Battalion moved across the Moder River, swept wide to the east, and moved into Oberhoffen with surprising ease. At 0330 hours on 1 February the only opposition apparent in the town was an enemy machine gun strongpoint. Just at dawn the enemy counterattacked from the northeast. Bridges for American armor were not complete, and the infantry had to combat enemy armor alone. By afternoon 2nd Battalion forces had withdrawn to the southern part of Oberhoffen to reorganize. During the afternoon a company of Combat Command B's tanks made a diversionary attack on the eastern sector of Oberhoffen. At 1300 hours the 1st Battalion of the 142nd Infantry had been ordered to attack through the 2nd Battalion after dark and continue with the mission of clearing Oberhoffen. This in effect cancelled the anticipated drive of the 1st and 3rd Battalions to the east.

Meanwhile, in the area west of Herrlisheim, the 141st Infantry had established a 28-man strongpoint along the Zorn River. While this group was probing for a bridgehead to the southeast side of the river, elements of the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, operating from the French II Corps zone, attacked to the north of Gambsheim. These two drives were moving toward each other.

Artillery fire on both sides was limited by the shortage of ammunition. The 36th Division artillery had been limited to 11 rounds per day, and the Commanding General had to request permission for additional expenditures. Documents show that the German forces had

been informed that the situation on the eastern front made necessary drastic economy in artillery ammunition, and that as an alternative measure, sniper activity was to be increased.

Elements of the 1st Battalion of the 142nd Infantry moved across the Moder and into battle for Oberhoffen at 2200 hours on 1 February. Companies A and C had established an east-west line several hundred yards inside the town a few hours later and held up there until dawn. During the night the Germans drew on forces in Schirrheim and Drusenheim to meet the expected renewal of attack in Oberhoffen. The battle continued throughout 2 February with tanks and infantry em-



DRUSENHEIM WOODS

" . . . The first objective of the 3rd Battalion of the 142nd Infantry was the Drusenheim woods between Rohrwiller and Drusenheim . . . "

ployed by both sides. To speed up the clearing of Oberhoffen General Dahlquist ordered an enveloping attack in the afternoon by two companies of tanks from Combat Command B; but this effort was ineffectual. Houses and small areas exchanged hands several times during the

afternoon. At darkness the 1st Battalion was still only part way into Oberhoffen.

In spite of the fact that Oberhoffen was not yet clear, four battalions of the division moved out from the existing Bischwiller-Weyersheim line to clear the enemy from the west bank of the Rhine from Drusenheim southward to the French line. The first objective of the 3rd Battalion of the 142nd Infantry was the Drusenheim woods between Rohrwiller and Drusenheim. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 143rd Infantry were to seize Rohrwiller and then swing south to Herrlisheim. Attacking to the north of Gambsheim, the 3rd Battalion of the



THE MODER RIVER ROSE RAPIDLY

"... Four days of extremely mild temperature had melted a foot of snow, flooded the lowlands of the attack route ..."

141st Infantry was to form the second arm of a pincer on Herrlisheim.

Four days of extremely mild temperature had melted a foot of snow, flooded the lowlands of the attack route, and softened up the ground. The Moder River rose rapidly, and the 3rd Battalion of the

142nd Regiment crossed a treadway bridge through ankle-deep water. Footbridges were washed out completely. During the night troops pushed into the Drusenheim woods, but the Germans still held the wooded section along the Rohrwiller-Drusenheim road. The two battalions of the 143rd Infantry Regiment attacked through water three feet deep to occupy Rohrwiller, where the enemy was taken by surprise but put up stiff resistance. American casualties exceeded the 210 prisoners taken from the 10th SS Panzer Division elements. Tank operations generally were hampered by flood conditions. Troops of the 143rd Infantry elements were kept from gaining control of the territory between Rohrwiller and the Rhine because tanks could not be deployed across the open fields to support the infantry.

The approach march of two companies of the 3rd Battalion of the 141st Infantry, which began at 0300 hours on 3 February, was very difficult. Clouds overcast the sky, and the troops waded through water to their hips. Where the water was not deep the ground was very muddy and slippery. Troops came up to the edge of Herrlisheim without realizing they were so close to it in the darkness. They became involved in a heavy fire fight, which lasted until 0645 hours, when the men saw the houses of the town directly ahead of them and dashed for the cover of the buildings. From then until 1030 hours the 150 to 175 men who had gained shelter in the houses watched for supporting tanks to appear. At 1030 hours German tanks and infantry launched an attack, and American troops started withdrawal to Weyersheim.

During the night of 2 February and into 3 February the see-saw battle in Oberhoffen continued. Elements of the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion of Combat Command B began relief of the 1st Battalion of the 142nd Regiment at noon. The defensive line of the 68th Battalion was set up in Oberhoffen with the northwest portion of the town still in German hands. The following day elements of the 142nd and 143rd Infantry Regiments attacked to clear the remainder of the woods between Rohrwiller and Drusenheim. Neither made notable progress. Terrain conditions still precluded pressing the attack on Herrlisheim.

While the fighting continued in Oberhoffen, on 6 February the 143rd Infantry relieved the 2nd Battalion of the 142nd Infantry in

Drusenheim Wood and took control of the sector extending generally along the line Drusenheim Wood-Herrlisheim-Offendorf. Passing south with a small force, troops of the 143rd Infantry Regiment entered Herrlisheim without opposition but found buildings heavily mined and booby-trapped. Patrols reached the edge of Drusenheim, which was found to be strongly held. The day before elements of the 141st Regiment had been relieved by the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, which had found Offendorf along the Rhine mined and booby-trapped but apparently without enemy.

After darkness on 5 February the 141st and 142nd Regiments relieved the 314th and 315th Infantry Regiments of the 79th Division as part of a reshuffling of forces on the corps front. The 79th Infantry Division was taken out of the line. After these reliefs the front of the 36th Division extended from the eastern edge of Haguenau to the French line at Gambsheim. Because of the taking of Rohrwiller and the German evacuation of Herrlisheim, the line bulged somewhat eastward from where it had been on 1 February. The 101st Airborne Division held the line west from Haguenau between the 36th and 103rd Divisions. By 3 February Seventh Army Headquarters had received instructions from SHAEF that the 79th Division would move from the army area. Two days later it was learned that the 79th Division, which had served with Seventh Army since 29 September 1944, was to be sent to the Ninth Army and was to start movement on 16 February. Except for the action in the 36th Division sector between Oberhoffen and Gambsheim the VI Corps front west into the Low Vosges remained quiescent.

The main action of the 36th Division during the remainder of its stay in the Rhine sector involved the 142nd Regiment, which cleared Oberhoffen, and the 143rd Regiment, which established Rhine outposts and attacked Drusenheim. When the 142nd Infantry relieved the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, the battle for Oberhoffen began again. On 11 February the town was finally considered cleared of the enemy although one flare-up action remained to be fought in the railroad station and factory, both in the extreme northwest edge of town.

The 143rd Regiment in the meantime pushed out toward Drusenheim and the Rhine. The flooded condition of the terrain precluded

the use of armor, so the regiment was able to proceed with its mission only slowly. By the afternoon of 7 February outposts had been established in the woods along the Rhine, and joint outposts were being maintained with the 3rd Algerian Division of the French on the south flank. On the morning of 10 February the Rhine outposts were relieved by elements of the 141st Regiment. Troops of the 143rd Infantry attacking Drusenheim were repulsed after a day-long effort to take the town. On the night of 10-11 February the movement of the regiment into division reserve and its relief by the 141st Infantry began.

Because of a SHAEF request for the withdrawal of the 101st Airborne Division made on 15 February, a series of reliefs was ordered on the VI Corps front. Beginning on 19 February the 14th Armored Division was put into the line. The sector from Bischwiller to the Rhine was taken over by the French. The 36th Division moved farther west to take over the area vacated by the 101st Airborne Division, which had received orders to move out of the army area and revert to the control of the First Allied Airborne Army. Between 21 and 24 February these reliefs were accomplished.

The limited objective attack of the 36th Division to clear the Rhine sector during the early part of February was the only offensive operation of any importance attempted on the Moder River front before the opening of an Allied offensive on the Siegfried Line and the Saar-Palatinate in the middle of March. The divisions on the line limited their activities to heavy patrolling, strengthening defenses, training, and making preparations for the coming attack. After the fighting in Oberhoffen the VI Corps sector of the army front settled down to more than a month of inactivity before the Seventh Army offensive that opened on 15 March. Farther west, from the Low Vosges to St. Avold, the XV and later the XXI Corps were engaging the enemy in a series of actions to prepare for the 15 March assault.

XV Corps on the Western Flank

The western flank of Seventh Army, west of the Low Vosges and in the Sarre Valley, had lapsed by the end of January into the quiet of static defense as the enemy began the withdrawal of several of his

major units for employment elsewhere on the western front and in the east. By 10 February all known German reserves in the Saar-Palatinate had departed for other fronts.

This exodus of units carried away the enemy's striking force. The last days of January saw only about 4,500 German infantry effectives on the line west of the Vosges on the Seventh Army front. Approximately 1,500 of these comprised the 347th Infantry Division, located in the Forbach area; 1,300 were estimated to be with the 19th Infantry Division near Sarreguemines; and the remaining 1,700 formed the elements of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division that held the line in the Rimling sector. The Germans could do little but leave the initiative to the opposing Seventh Army and devote themselves to the construction of defensive positions. Their efforts towards improving their defenses along the line of contact were continuous, and the degree of contact there was determined solely by the action of Seventh Army.

When on 25 January, XXI Corps had been moved into the Colmar Pocket to take over a sector in the First French Army zone, XV Corps had reassumed command of the entire army front in the Sarre Valley. Units of XV Corps now manned a line that was approximately 44 miles in length.

The conformation of the Sarre Valley terrain tended to divide the corps front into three compartments from west to east: the area from the western forests to the Sarre River, which runs north to the German border, where it bends first to the west and then to the northwest; the area between the Sarre River and the Bliesbruck through which flows the Blies River, bending south, then north, then south again to join the Sarre River at Sarreguemines; and the area of the foothills rolling down to the Blies from the Low Vosges.

During the period of the Colmar Drive, units of XV Corps in the west maintained their positions with a program of aggressive patrolling and raids to insure the retention of the initiative in that area by Seventh Army in preparation for the day when the grand offensive would be resumed. The difficulties brought on by January's bitter cold, heavy snow, and frozen ground were matched almost in the extreme by

February's sudden change in weather. The rains came and with them the disappearance of the snow. The big thaw was on, and in the mud and slush four infantry divisions and a cavalry group manned the XV Corps lines.

Defense on the Sarre Front

Holding the west flank, southwest of Saarbruecken, was the 106th Cavalry Group. On 11 February these troops were relieved in their defensive positions by the newly-arrived 101st Cavalry Group. To the right of the cavalry and south of Saarbruecken was the 70th Infantry Division. The infantry units of the division, the 274th, 275th, and 276th Regiments, which had been designated as Task Force Herren, had initially entered the Seventh Army line on the Rhine flank late in December, had been transferred by VI Corps to the Philippsbourg arm of the Bitche salient, where they had been relieved by the 103rd Division in mid-January, at which time they had come under the command of the XV Corps and had entered the line on the Sarre front. With the arrival of Major General Allison J. Barnett and his staff on 3 February, the task force was dissolved into the 70th Infantry Division; and the remaining component parts of the division closed in to their respective assembly areas within the next few days.



MAJOR GENERAL ALLISON
J. BARNETT
". . . 70th Infantry Division . . ."

Adjoining the units of the 70th Division was the 63rd Infantry Division in the Sarreguemines area. The 253rd and 255th Infantry Regiments of the division had first occupied these positions while the third regiment of the division, the 254th Infantry, was being employed in the Colmar operations attached to the 3rd Infantry Division. These regiments which had made up Task Force Harris had been first employed by the Seventh Army on the Rhine flank north of Strasbourg. On the

last day of December two regiments had been transferred to XV Corps to strengthen the lines of the 44th and 100th Divisions on the corps right flank. The third regiment had been attached to the 3rd Infantry Division on the Colmar front. On 1 February Task Force Harris was dissolved with its units reverting to the control of the 63rd Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Louis E. Hibbs. On 6 February the division, which had received its artillery and supporting troops, assumed command of its portion of the line. The 44th Division held the sector in the Gros Rederching area, east of the 63rd Division; and on its right was the 100th Division, covering the east flank of the corps in the area west and southwest of Bitche.



MAJOR GENERAL LOUIS
E. HIBBS
". . . 63rd Infantry Division . . ."



MAJOR GENERAL W. H.
MORRIS, JR.
". . . 10th Armored Division . . ."

A counter-reconnaissance screen was constantly maintained in the corps sector, east and west of the Sarre River and south of the Maginot Line, by armored elements of the corps. In the latter half of January and early February this protection was furnished by units of the 10th Armored Division following their arrival from the Third Army. As a part of the general reshuffling of forces on the western front to meet German offensive thrusts the 10th Armored Division, commanded by Major General W. H. Morris, Jr., had been assigned to Seventh Army to take the place of the 2nd French Armored Division, which was to be passed to the control of the First French Army for Colmar Pocket operations. On 10 February the 12th Armored Division, its work in the Colmar area completed, relieved the 10th Armored in the XV Corps

sector and continued the mission of counter-reconnaissance. The 10th Armored Division moved out to Metz for return to Third Army control.

In the defensive lull that followed the failure of the German New Year's offensive all these units on the XV Corps front pursued a comparatively uneventful, triple-phased program of improvement of defenses, training, and periodic raids. Into the corps area on 23 January and out again on 28 January the 35th Infantry Division, less one regimental combat team, had been shifted by SHAEF orders; this division had come from Third Army's XX Corps and had remained with Seventh Army for six days only. Unaffected by these movements of troops on high level decision, front line units of XV Corps strengthened their positions by the installation of tactical and protective wire, mines, and overhead cover for foxholes and emplacements. In January, when the thermometer sometimes dropped as low as 1 degree Fahrenheit, the frozen ground made digging of emplacements particularly difficult; and the 44th Division found it necessary to use explosives to break the ground. In that same divisional sector it was found advisable to use concertina wire almost exclusively for wiring-in the front line positions because of the difficulty of driving pickets into the frozen ground. The battles of the early part of the month, and the incidence of trench foot due to severe weather, had reduced some rifle companies to a strength of 50 to 60 men on the line, making it necessary in some instances to send overhead personnel into the lines as riflemen. In the 114th Infantry of the 44th Division it was necessary to commit the antitank company to hold a portion of the line.

There was an influx of reinforcements at this time, and all units conducted intensive programs of training and battle indoctrination for these new men. Even veteran troops in rear areas found it expedient to do range firing and re-zero their weapons. The 70th Division handled their 2,000 reinforcements in typical fashion. Since most of these men had had but a minimum of infantry experience when they arrived, it was urgent that they receive more training than they would ordinarily gain by merely being assigned to the line and working there with experienced men. A rigorous four-day schedule, therefore, was instituted, which included basic weapons, map reading and use of compass, minor tactics,

and field work. To insure teamwork in battle, operating procedures for squads and platoons in combat situations were emphasized.

In accordance with the policy of retaining the initiative during this calm the constant patrolling that was carried on by all units was frequently featured by well-planned raids, sometimes of company strength. These raids were most often sharp, nocturnal thrusts into the enemy-held towns across the line. In the 70th Division raids that were made on Oeting, Lixing, Grosbliederstroff, and Brandenbusch Woods the mission was constant and concise to capture prisoners and kill as many of the enemy as possible.

Immediately to the right of XV Corps in the Low Vosges Mountains south of Bitche the same conditions of defending, raiding, and intensive training prevailed. This sector was the west flank of VI Corps; but while the energies of most VI Corps units were being expended in the task of reducing the German bridgehead north of Strasbourg, its groups in the Bitche area had the identical mission held by XV Corps defensive line. Until 16 February the 45th Infantry Division maintained



MAJOR GENERAL HARRY
J. COLLINS

"... 42nd Infantry Division ..."

this portion of the VI Corps front. On that day the 45th Division was relieved by the 42nd Infantry Division, whose infantry regiments, the 222nd, 232nd and 242nd had originally joined Seventh Army as Task Force Linden for Rhine flank defense. After having absorbed the initial blows of the German Gamsheim bridgehead and after having fought against enemy thrusts in the Hatten-Rittershoffen sector under the command of the 79th Division, these units had been withdrawn from the line by the Seventh Army. An army directive issued on 6 February ordered a comprehensive training program for the 42nd Division, which was to remain in army reserve, according to plan, until about 16 February. At that time the 42nd Infantry Division, under the command of Major General Harry J. Collins and reunited with its non-infantry components,

A



nengen



entered the VI Corps line as the 45th Division reverted to army reserve. The 42nd Division continued the defense of the Bitche sector into March.

The period of static defense, the time of holding to positions, emerging from them occasionally to strike violently and fleetingly in a sudden raid, and then returning to the original line, lasted little more than a month. Mid-February came, and the XV Corps was ready to attack once more.

Plans for a Limited Offensive

This attack was not to be on a grand scale. It was specifically designated as a limited objective attack, and its purpose was "to rectify and shorten present front lines." Shortening the line would make for economy of force. Fewer men would be required to man its defenses. In addition, the objectives to be gained represented terrain more favorable for the launching of a future great offensive. There were two prominent "sags" in the corps line: at Gros Rederching in the 44th Division sector and in the area of the 63rd Division at Welferding. These were what must be "rectified", and at the same time it would be necessary for the 70th Division on the left to keep abreast by moving its entire front forward.

Following a series of diversionary raids to be carried out by units of the 100th Division on the night of D minus 1, it was planned that the 44th Division would attack on D-Day in conjunction with the right elements of the 63rd Division to eliminate the Gros Rederching "sag". On D plus 2 the left elements of the 63rd Division would attack in conjunction with the 70th Division on their left, wipe out the Welferding "sag", and advance the entire western half of the corps front. It was originally planned that the 101st Cavalry Group would attack on D plus 3 in conjunction with the left elements of the 70th Division, but this last drive in the series of limited objective attacks was later postponed. The entire operation was to be carried out in secrecy in order to confuse the enemy as much as possible. It was felt that knowledge by the enemy that these attacks were being planned for the XV Corps sector only and were only limited in objective would impede the success of the operation

and dispel any nervousness on his part over a possible major, coordinated Seventh Army advance.

"To rectify and shorten present front lines" was to mean a slugging offensive, for some a quick raid, and for others a complicated crosswater movement. Each small and sharply limited action was a drive to seize high ground a few miles farther on, to give the Seventh Army a taut line behind which it could build up offensive strength. D-Day was set for 15 February, and H-Hour at 0645 hours.

The initial attack was a problem in planning for the 44th, 63rd, and 100th Divisions. The objective assigned to the 44th Division was a



THE ROLLING COUNTRY AROUND RIMLING

" . . . The objective assigned to the 44th Division was . . . between Rimling and Epping-Urbach . . . "

general east-west line from a point between Rimling and Epping-Urbach west to the northern fringes of the eastern third of the Bliesbrucken Woods. On the left flank the 255th Infantry of the 63rd Division was

to attack the middle third of the Bliesbrucken Woods in conjunction with the 44th Division. The western third of the woods, separated from the larger mass by a clearing of about 500 yards in width, was already within the lines of the 63rd Division. On the right of the 44th Division the 100th Division was to move its left flank elements slightly forward to conform to the general advance.

The plan of attack formulated by the 44th Division called for the employment of all three infantry regiments, to be supported by the 749th Tank Battalion. A number of considerations were responsible for such a plan. First, the nature of the terrain made a natural division of the objective into three parts. Secondly, the necessity for withholding a large division reserve was reduced to a minimum since the objective of the attack was limited and detailed knowledge of enemy dispositions gave reasonable assurance that no large enemy force would intervene prior to the seizure of the objective. A suitable division reserve was provided for, therefore, by the requirement that each regiment maintain one battalion in reserve to be committed only on division order. A third reason for the decision to strike with all three regiments on the line was the desire to inflict the maximum damage possible on the enemy. Since the distance to be covered was short, no more than two miles, it was considered advisable to strike with maximum power and speed so as to penetrate the enemy line rapidly and take his positions from the flank and rear. The desirability of maintaining centralized control over the division tanks was influenced by two factors: the poor condition of the ground made it questionable whether tanks would be able to function effectively in all parts of the division zone, and better results were anticipated if the tanks were to be employed in mass for shock action to exploit a penetration anywhere along the front.

The 324th Infantry on the right and the 71st Infantry in the center were to attack at 0545 hours. This was an hour before daylight. The open terrain and the high rolling hills gave the enemy excellent observation. On the left the 114th Infantry and the 255th Infantry Regiment of the 63rd Division were to jump off half an hour later. Contact in their zone was closer, and a good deal of their sector was heavily wooded. At 0645 hour, as soon as visibility would permit coordinated

action with the infantry, the 749th Tank Battalion was to attack, passing through the infantry regiments to seize regimental objectives and dominate them until they could be consolidated by the infantry units.



MACHINE GUN EMBLACEMENT IN BLIESBRUCKEN WOODS

"... Contact in their zone was closer, and a good deal of their sector was heavily wooded ..."

Although eight battalions of field artillery were under division command for this operation in addition to the supporting fires of corps artillery, it was decided to attack without an artillery preparation. Because the enemy positions were well dug-in with overhead cover, it was thought that artillery would have little effect. Moreover, it was felt that the surprise gained by attacking without artillery would outweigh the possible destructive effect of a preparatory barrage.

On the right flank of the 44th Division the 324th Infantry had for its objective the Buchenbusch Woods between Rimling and Epping-Urbach and the high ground beyond. The enemy in that area was the

37th Panzer Grenadier Division, at least two of whose companies had been identified as manning a main line of resistance that ran generally on an east-west line through the woods, which were about 1,300 yards wide. Active patrolling of the past weeks had made the men of the 324th Regiment well acquainted with the terrain and the principal strong points in the enemy's defense. It had been discovered that while the south edge of the woods was heavily mined and wired with many emplacements and machine gun positions, the open slopes east and west of the woods were either unguarded at night or held by only a weak outpost that could be avoided or quickly subdued.

The Initial Attacks

The attack of the 324th Infantry was a double envelopment. With the 3rd Battalion on the left and the 2nd Battalion on the right, the regiment quickly outflanked the Buchenbusch Woods on both sides. The battalions, moving stealthily through the darkness, achieved complete tactical surprise. They were on either side of the woods before a shot was fired. As dawn broke, they attacked from the flanks and the rear. Enemy survivors of the first assault could either surrender or be driven back onto their own mines and wire; 161 surrendered. In the middle of the division zone the 71st Regiment had attacked against negligible German resistance, had overrun a ridge southwest of Rimling by daylight, and together with tank support from Company A of the 749th Tank Battalion moved on toward Rimling and the high ground northwest of the town. By mid-morning Rimling was taken as tanks, tank-destroyers, artillery, and infantry combined to force the Germans out.

On the division left flank enemy resistance was more severe. The 114th Infantry had moved out at 0615 hours on 15 February toward its objective on high ground two miles ahead. On the left the 1st Battalion made slow, steady progress through the Bliesbrucken woods, and by 1300 hours had reached its objective on the north edge of the woods. Southeast of these woods, however, the 2nd Battalion had immediately encountered the hard core of the German resistance.

The enemy had created well-fortified strong-points out of two farms, Bellevue and Brandelfingerhoff, both approximately 1,000 yards northeast of the battalion line. Hundreds of rounds of artillery had been



BELLEVUE FARM WITH BLIESBRUCKEN WOODS IN BACKGROUND

" . . . Most of the structure of the buildings had been demolished . . . "

fired against them. Most of the structure of the buildings had been demolished, but their cellars served as cover for enemy riflemen and machine gun crews and as vantage points for forward observers for artillery, mortar, and nebelwerfer batteries. The companies of the 38th Panzer Grenadier Regiment had entrenched themselves firmly around the farms. Many small mine fields, largely anti-personnel, were scattered along the front. The 2nd Battalion's plan of attack was to by-pass initially these farms and seize its sector of the regimental objective beyond. Then the farms would be taken by an assault from the rear. Only a small combat patrol was to advance directly against Bellevue Farm to divert the attention of the enemy.

Only the first few minutes went according to plan. The point patrol, moving on Bellevue Farm, was unable to advance far in the face of heavy enemy fire. Company G, attempting a side-slip to the west,



BRANDELFINGERHOF FARM

" . . . At the same time to Company E was assigned the reduction of Brandelfingerhof Farm . . . "

ran into strong enemy resistance and was stopped. It was now decided that Bellevue and its surrounding area must be cleaned up before the battalion could proceed to its objective. Companies E and G however, moving toward Bellevue, were unable to advance past the southeastern edge of Bliesbrucken Woods. Taking advantage of the concealment afforded there, they spread out in a skirmish line and returned the strong enemy fire that was coming from the farm.

Company F was then ordered to move north against Bellevue Farm under cover of the fire that Company G could deliver from Bliesbrucken Woods. At the same time to Company E was assigned the

reduction of Brandelfingerhoff Farm. Shortly after noon both farm strongpoints were cleared of the enemy, but the battalion objective had not yet been attained. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion of the 71st Infantry, which had been in reserve, had been ordered by division to attack westward to seize the right half of the 114th Infantry objective, the high ground beyond the two farms. With this assistance the 114th Regiment came up to the line of its objective. The battle at Bellevue and Brandelfingerhoff had cost the 114th Infantry 154 casualties. However, the enemy had lost more than 100 killed and wounded in this action, and 129 of his troops had been taken prisoner.

During the day on 15 February planes of the XII Tactical Air Force flew 96 sorties along the length of the 44th Division front, supporting the attack with bombs, rockets, and strafing of enemy strongpoints. By 1500 hours all elements of the division had reached their assigned objectives and were digging in. From interrogations it seemed evident that the 2nd Battalion of the 37th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and the 3rd Battalion of the 38th Panzer Grenadier Regiment had been destroyed. Many of the enemy had fled to the north. This uncontrolled flight was probably the reason for the tardiness and ineffectiveness of the enemy reactions.

The first counterattack did not come until 0320 hours on 16 February. Launched from northeast of the Buchenbusch Woods by an estimated 100 infantry supported by mortars and machine guns, it was broken up by effective artillery fire. At 0530 hours a stronger attack was made farther west in the area northwest of Rimling by an estimated 200 men of the 38th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Supported by ten armored vehicles, this thrust in the darkness succeeded temporarily in penetrating the positions of the 71st Infantry. The attack was contained after it had driven through the line some 800 yards, and by 0830 hours a counterattack by the 2nd Battalion had restored the regimental positions. The German counterattacks continued into 17 February, but they were all successfully repulsed with heavy enemy losses and the new 44th Division line was securely held.

West of the 44th Division the 255th Infantry of the 63rd Division had a more difficult time as it attacked in the center of the

Bliesbrucken Woods. The 3rd Battalion, making the main effort, was to seize and organize the high ground in the woods north of the railroad track. Fire of the 1st Battalion from the left was to support the advance. At 0615 hours on 15 February Company I and Company K had moved out toward the objective. In the mist and darkness the troops were able to locate the enemy positions only by the muzzle flashes of hostile guns. Anti-personnel mines, affixed to many of the trees, were frequently detonated by direct or ricocheting enemy small arms fire. The advance through the forest, thick with tangled underbrush, was slow.

Small arms fire and hand grenades had little effect against German dug-in emplacements which had thick walls and roofs covered by split logs. Bazooka fire was hardly better. Infantry troops, pushing through the German fields of fire, encircled these positions and from the rear threw grenades into the tunnel-like entrance to the fortifications. Frequent German counterattacks, made by troops who wore parts of American uniforms, held the advance of Company I platoons to a minimum. By noon, having advanced some 200 to 300 yards past the line of departure, Company I was pinned down.

The attack of Company K on the right had met lighter opposition. Finding paths through the mine fields, the platoons, with a section of M Company machine guns, moved forward slowly and deliberately in the face of the heavy small arms fire. Mortar shells began to drop in their rear. About 1130 hours the company had seized its objective and was well along in the process of organizing new defensive positions and mopping up the scattered and isolated enemy groups that remained.

In the I Company sector Company B, the regimental reserve, was committed to cover the withdrawal of forward elements, as plans were made for a new attack. A flanking assault by Company B at 1925 hours was brought to a stop by a rocket barrage and the machine gun fire from four bunkers. Soon after 1100 hours on the next morning, 16 February, the attack was resumed by Companies B, I, and L. In support of this operation were an 81mm mortar section from Company M and the 863rd Field Artillery Battalion.

The approaches of all three companies paralleled each other, as they turned north against enemy high ground. The strength now

mustered was sufficient to carry the hill, and by 1330 hours it was taken. The last phase in the elimination of the Gros Rederching "sag" had been completed.

Return to Germany

The limited objective attacks on the western half of the XV Corps front, to be made by the 253rd Infantry of the 63rd Division and by the 70th Division, followed the initial attacks of the 44th Division and the 255th Infantry by two days. To the 253rd Infantry was given the mission of eliminating the Welferding Salient establishing a main line of resistance on the high ground running from the Sarre River just below Bubingen to the northern edge of the Vorderwald and southeast to the town of Bliesmengen. Welferding is immediately west of Sarreguemines. The sag conformed to the lines of the Blies and Sarre Rivers as they dip south and north through the two towns. To the 70th Division farther west was assigned a separate but coordinated maneuver. Once the troops of the 253rd Infantry had crossed the Sarre and the Blies Rivers, they would be fighting on German soil.

To divert the attention of the enemy from the sector of the attack, the 255th Infantry on the right was directed to carry out two diversionary raids early on the morning of 17 February. The first of these two preliminary operations, raid *Portland*, was carried out by a patrol from Company E. After crossing the Blies River at 0200 hours in rubber assault boats and on a bridge hastily thrown across the stream, the raiding party entered the village of Babkirchen shortly after 0600 hours behind the cover of a barrage of mortars, artillery, and the guns of the regimental cannon company and within less than an hour returned with 11 prisoners. Raid *Seattle*, made by a lieutenant and 17 men of Company B between the hours of 0300 and 0820, was directed against the town of Bliesbruck. The river was crossed quietly in rubber assault boats. Following a two-minute artillery barrage on Bliesbruck by the 863rd Field Artillery Battalion, the patrol entered the town hurling white phosphorous and fragmentation grenades, firing automatic rifles and submachine guns. The patrol killed more than 20 enemy, returned

to the regimental lines, brought back one prisoner, and had suffered only three wounded casualties.

The main assault of the 253rd Infantry was also to begin in the early hours of 17 February. Facing the regiment was an enemy line that ran down the Sarre from Grosbliederstroff to Sarreguemines and curled northward around the Blies River through the Muhlen Wald from which it ran directly east to Habkirchen. The enemy held his line in depth, although he had concentrated most of his manpower and his field fortifications in the "U" between the Sarre and Blies Rivers north of Sarreguemines. On the line in front of the 253rd Infantry were elements of the 19th Volks Grenadier Division.

The regimental plan of attack called for pushing the 3rd Battalion across the Blies River, through the Muhlen Wald, and straight up to the Vorderwald, where the most advanced point of the new main line of resistance would be established. The 1st Battalion was to liquidate enemy resistance south of the Vorderwald and open supply lines to the new positions above Sarreguemines. The 2nd Battalion, launching the initial assault, was to occupy the sector between the Muhlen Wald and Habkirchen and establish an outpost line between Bliesransbach and Bliesmengen.

At 0200 hours on 17 February the 2nd Battalion on the regimental right flank moved out under artificial moonlight furnished by the 353rd Searchlight Battalion. There was only scattered resistance. By noon, however, the enemy was throwing in heavy and accurate mortar fire. Strengthened by reserve troops the Germans launched a counterattack near Bliesgersviller against the left flank of Company G, which was the advance force of the battalion. At 1700 hours enemy infantry supported by tanks overran the areas of two rifle squads and a section of attached machine guns. Fire of the regimental cannon company was directed against this breakthrough, and the remainder of G Company, reinforced, drove the enemy off with heavy casualties. Early in the afternoon of the next day an assault against Bliesgersviller by Company F, preceded by an artillery barrage, cleared the town of the enemy in an hour and a half.

The 1st Battalion, meanwhile, on the left flank of the regiment had crossed the Sarre between Welferding and Sarreguemines at 0430 hours on 17 February on a footbridge thrown up by A Company of the 263rd Engineer Battalion. Company B in the lead seized high ground northeast of Auersmacher by 0745 hours to protect and support the advance of the 3rd Battalion to the north. By nightfall Company A had patrols in the town of Auersmacher and occupied high ground to the south. The next day these patrols were driven out as German infantry and self-propelled guns infiltrated into the town, posing a threat to the



SAAR RIVER AT SARREGUEMINES

"... The left flank of the 253rd Regiment was now secure, and the supply route to the 3rd Battalion was open . . ."

left flank of the 253rd Infantry if they could build themselves up to a sizeable force.

All available artillery was placed on the town to prevent a breakthrough. At the same time the 1st Battalion of the 254th Infantry was attached to the regiment, relieving Company A in positions south of

Auersmacher. Company A, reinforced by a platoon from Company C, prepared to attack the town at dawn on 19 February. After a ten-minute artillery preparation the attack was launched, and after four hours of fierce house-to-house fighting Auersmacher was taken. The left flank of the 253rd Regiment was now secure, and the supply route to the 3rd Battalion was open.

The 3rd Battalion had reached the Vorderwald two days before. Its crossing of the Blies River had been preceded by a 15 minute barrage by batteries of 155mm howitzers from the 718th and 961st Field Artillery Battalions, designed primarily to cut the enemy's wire and render ineffective his anti-personnel mine fields in the Muhlen Wald. After crossing the river by means of assault boats and a wooden assault bridge constructed in 45 minutes by the 263rd Engineer Battalion, the 3rd Battalion of the 253rd Infantry advanced swiftly against harassing mortar and small arms fire. By early afternoon the Vorderwald had been reached and seized. The battalion dug in and prepared to meet enemy counterattacks.

During the night and the next day the Germans launched a series of counterattacks, which were repelled with heavy losses to the enemy. In the evening of 18 February, however, groups of Germans infiltrated into the woods from the west, southwest, and southeast. With the taking of Auersmacher, a mile south of the woods, by the 1st Battalion on the next day this enemy threat was lifted. Once the Vorderwald was secure, the town of Kleinblittersdorf, just across the Sarre from Grosbliederstroff, became the next target. This town was taken by Company B on the afternoon of 19 February after sharp fighting lasting four and a half hours.

The final action in this phase came after a five-day lapse in the consolidation of positions, and in the reorganization, relocation, and resupply of units. The action called for the seizure of the towns of Bubingen and Bliesransbach and the occupation of the high ground running east and southeast between the two communities. On 24 February the 253rd Infantry, supported by Company B of the 254th Infantry, made the final push, all three of its battalions attacking on line. The two towns and the heights between were taken easily, and the

elimination of the Welferding Salient was complete. The 63rd Division now held the ground that had been designated as its objective in the original plan of attack for XV Corps. The Seventh Army had again crossed the Franco-German line.

Approach to the Siegfried Line

West of the 63rd Division and holding a line from Welferding northwest to a point south of Forbach was the 70th Division, which was



DRAGON'S TEETH — PART OF SIEGFRIED DEFENSES

" . . . Through these hills and towns ran the first belt in a series of permanent fortifications guarding the approaches to Germany . . . "

to take part in the limited offensive of the XV Corps by advancing its line to the north in consonance with the advances of other corps divisions. Settled on the hills and ridges of northern Lorraine the 70th Division faced the outer cordons of the Siegfried Line. In front of the division was a series of hills, unevenly wooded, dominating wide, un-

covered draws. A network of roads followed the valley floor, connecting the many towns and villages along its route with the industrial and mining centers of Forbach, Stiring-Wendel, and Saarbruecken, southern gateway to Germany's Sarre basin and a fortress city of the Siegfried Line. Through these hills and towns ran the first belt in the series of permanent fortifications guarding the approaches to Germany.

More specifically the mission of the 70th Division was the capture of heights along the Sarre River south and southwest of Saarbruecken. The reduction of Saarbruecken would be required for any future Seventh Army drive through the Siegfried Line, and possession of the commanding heights that gave observation of the city's defenses was essential. The plan of attack called for the seizure of high ground on the lines Wehrden-Schoeneck and Stiring-Wendel-Bubingen. The 101st Cavalry Group was to relieve the 70th Division in the Wehrden-Clarenthal area after the objective had been taken. The division attack was to be made with all three regiments on line, the 276th Infantry on the left, the 274th Infantry in the center, and the 275th Infantry on the right.

Continuous patrolling on the breadth of the sector had assisted in the discovery and identification of enemy positions and units. The enemy had constructed multiple belts of entrenchments and bunkers, wide antitank ditches, and other obstacles extending along the southern and southeastern slopes of the ridge system from the forest of Le Kleinwaeldchen south of Forbach to Le Pfaffenwald north of Alsting. There were two outpost lines of less formidable entrenchments, the first running west-east from Kerbach to Lixing and the second generally paralleling the Sarre River as it flows north from the area of Rouhling to Saarbruecken. Elements of the German 347th Infantry Division and the 19th VolksGrenadier Division occupied these defenses, while an estimated 800 reserves were spotted in the vicinity of Forbach and Stiring-Wendel.

One minute after midnight on 17 February the 276th Infantry, with the 3rd Battalion on the left and the 1st Battalion on the right, moved out through a heavy fog toward its initial objective, the hills between Oeting and Forbach. The main enemy positions in front of the 276th Infantry ran from Marienau to Forbach, through the southwest

edge of Le Kleinwaeldchen, and then southeast through Oeting to the heights of Le Kelsberg. Against enemy small arms and antitank mines the 3rd Battalion quickly overran Fahrberg Hill just northwest of Oeting, while the 1st Battalion took Le Kelsberg in the first hours of daylight. Nestled between these two heights and blocking the route of approach to Le Kleinwaeldchen, the village of Oeting was still in German hands. Simultaneous assaults from the east and west were launched upon the village by the two battalions, but the intense fire of four self-propelled 88mm guns hurled them back. Heavily mined roads prevented the arrival of supporting armor, and the 1st and 3rd Battalions withdrew to the two hills and dug in.

In the division center the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 274th Infantry had crossed their line of departure at 0430 hours on 17 February. Their ultimate objective was the clearing of Stiring-Wendel and the occupation of a sector of the heights south of the Sarre River, but first there was a series of hills and ridges and towns to be taken. The initial attack was upon the town of Kerbach and high ground to the northwest. Troops entered Kerbach easily, but further movement through the town was slowed down when the enemy counterattacked with tanks from Etzling and Behren. These attacks were beaten back by the accurate fire of supporting artillery, which scored direct hits upon groups of personnel and some of the tanks. By 1620 hours Kerbach and Behren to the west were cleared of Germans.

The 275th Infantry on the right flank had been ordered to assist the movement of the 274th Regiment by flanking fire and to advance on its own initial objectives, the towns of Lixing and Grosbliederstroff. With 1st, 3rd, and 2nd Battalions abreast from left to right, the 275th Regiment had moved into the attack at 0125 hours. Following the reduction of several strongpoints, the 1st Battalion cleared the high ground before Lixing. The 3rd Battalion advanced against heavy machine gun fire. During the afternoon German artillery found the range and shelled the attacking troops. On the right flank the 2nd Battalion kept pace and advanced to positions west of Grosbliederstroff from which it planned to attack the town. In preparation for the attack the road into Grosbliederstroff was swept of mines during the night.

At the end of the first day's action the entire division front had moved forward approximately one mile, and 198 prisoners had been taken. The enemy had devoted his main holding efforts to the more important towns and road junctions. Fog and rain had hampered the operations; communications had been limited by muddy roads and fields. Supporting tanks, attempting to move cross-country, had bogged down and several had been abandoned. It seemed apparent now that the enemy's main defense efforts would be centered at Forbach, Stiring-Wendel, and Spicheren in the line of advance of the 274th Infantry.

Early the next morning, 18 February, the attacking battalions of the 274th Infantry moved to the northwest and crossed the Etzling-Behren road. After a sharp fire fight had scattered small enemy groups, the battalions threaded their way uphill into the thick forest of Le Kreutzberg Ridge, just south of Stiring-Wendel. The rugged terrain, covered by stretches of underbrush, was ideal territory for ambush. Time and again enemy patrols were encountered and driven back. The ridge was dotted with a belt of bunkers, solid concrete up to eight feet thick, covered with earth for additional protection, and excellently sited and concealed.

About noon a German counterattack from Etzling was forced back by artillery and the fire of self-propelled guns. Enemy pressure, however, was maintained throughout the afternoon as a force of about 12 tanks repeatedly worked along the road south of Etzling, posing a constant threat to the 2nd Battalion on the regimental right flank; and German artillery, directed from an observation post in Etzling, continued unabated. In the late afternoon the attack of the regiment was halted to reestablish contact between the units that had been separated during the skirmishes. At the same time the threat to the regimental right flank was somewhat lifted as the 3rd Battalion of the 275th Infantry broke through and took Etzling.

Early in the morning the 275th Infantry on the division right flank had pushed the attack. The 1st Battalion had penetrated Lixing and systematically worked through the town house by house until it was cleared. Some of its troops advanced from Lixing toward Etzling, cautiously picking their way through the mine fields. In the center of

the regiment the 3rd Battalion had moved north of Lixing to approach Etzling from the east shortly after noon. After patrols had reconnoitered the village and its approaches, the battalion attacked. The action lasted just an hour; and 64 prisoners, almost the entire enemy force, were captured. Outposts were hurriedly dug in on the lower slopes of Le Pfaffenberg Hill, north of Etzling, which was the next link in the enemy's chain of defenses.

Farther east the 2nd Battalion had thrust its way into Grosbiederstroff. By mid-morning more than half the town was under control, and the German defense was concentrated in the northern end of the town. Enemy artillery and mortar fire from the east side of the Sarre River hindered but could not halt the battalion assault, and after a sharp fire fight the last German strongpoint in the town was reduced.

On the left flank of the 70th Division the village of Oeting, still in German hands, lay before the 276th Infantry. During the night the road into Oeting had been cleared of mines; and, when the attack was resumed on 18 February, the village was easily taken before mid-day. After repulsing a small infantry-tank counterattack the regiment pivoted to the northwest toward Forbach. Between the troops and Forbach, however, were three hills covered by the thick woods of the Kleinwaeldchen. The westernmost of the three hills rose sharply from this strip of forest, offering a complete view of Forbach and the ground as far south as Oeting. Perched on the rocky summit was an old, red-stone, castle known as the Schlossberg. Behind its ten-foot-thick walls was located an enemy observation post for mortar and artillery. The capture of the Schlossberg was the obvious prerequisite to the taking of Forbach.

By nightfall of 18 February two of the three hills in the Kleinwaeldchen had been overrun. The next morning Company I advanced cautiously to take the Schlossberg. Not a shot was fired on them; and, when the men scaled the outer walls, they found that the Schlossberg was deserted of enemy. Almost immediately heavy artillery and mortar fire began falling in the area. Between barrages the troops dug in around the buildings.

At 1920 hours a battery of 88mm guns began shelling the castle continuously and with great accuracy. Under the cover of the

shelling enemy patrols crept up to the outer perimeter of the company's defenses, and in the pitch blackness it was a simple matter for them to cut the wire. At 2040 hours the artillery barrage was stepped up to even



SCHLOSSBERG CASTLE

"... Perched on the rocky summit was an old, red-stone castle known as the Schlossberg . . ."

greater fury for a few minutes; and, as the fire lifted, German troops began rushing the castle from all sides, screaming wildly. The riflemen of Company I could not hold them, and the Germans broke through to within yards of the castle. The 81mm mortar fire of Company M and the artillery fire of the 884th Field Artillery Battalion were then signalled down upon the company's own defense area, and the effect of this counter-barrage forced the enemy to withdraw. The Schlossberg remained in possession of Company I, and the next move was the descent upon Forbach.

The assault of Forbach had begun late the same afternoon, 19 February. The plan of attack called for the seizure of the town by the

276th Infantry, assisted by the 3rd Battalion of the 274th Infantry. The road from Saarbruecken to Forbach was to be bombed and strafed by supporting aircraft in order to deny the enemy its use in bringing up reinforcements and supplies. The initial entry into Forbach was made by the 1st Battalion of the 276th Infantry and elements of the 3rd Battalion, 274th Infantry, as they forced their way into the southeast section of the city. The first two blocks were easily taken before flanking enemy machine gun fire and a heavy volume of artillery opened up and slowed down the progress. The 3rd Battalion of the 276th Infantry, less Company I, descended from the Kleinwaeldchen and joined in house-to-house fighting. The attack continued into the night; but against intense enemy fire and without the support of tanks, which could not maneuver effectively in the dark, operations were brought to a halt.

A fine drizzle and a thick fog persisted as day broke on 20 February. Displacement of artillery became difficult, and tanks were road-bound. The 70th Reconnaissance Troop, patrolling the division flanks, was paying particular attention to the eastern flank, where the attack of the adjacent 63rd Division was not developing sufficiently to bring it abreast of the 70th Division. This flank was moving rapidly as the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 275th Infantry, pushing against light resistance, captured the villages of Zinzing, Hesseling, and Alsting. A small counterattack east of Zinzing was dispersed, and the two battalions fanned out into the woodland north and east. On their left the 3rd Battalion of the regiment had failed in its attempts to drive the Germans off Le Pfaffenberg Hill.

In Forbach the slow, systematic reduction of the city was resumed. Assaulting troops of the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 276th Infantry, advanced through the streets toward the railroad that ran through the northwestern edge of the town. The enemy was forced back house by house and block by block; and, as he yielded each small area, he hit it heavily with mortars and artillery. Simultaneously, units of the 274th Infantry, just east of Forbach, had worked their way to within a short distance of the Forbach-Saarbruecken road, while other troops of the regiment swept northeast to high ground between Spicheren and Stiring-

Wendel. Spicheren Heights north of the town became the scene of particularly bitter German resistance.

On the morning of 21 February the weather cleared, and the pressure of the 274th Infantry, north and northwest of Spicheren, forced the enemy out of the town. Farther right, the 1st Battalion of the 275th Infantry had pushed north along the Sarre River to take the forested high ground overlooking eastern Saarbruecken. Two strong enemy counterattacks, however, forced forward elements of the battalion back approximately 1,000 yards to the middle of the woods before the massed fire of infantry, artillery, tanks, and tank-destroyers halted the German drive.

Farther west in Forbach the German 347th Infantry Division was receiving local Volkssturm replacements and some 300 infantry troops from the 719th Infantry Division, which was holding the neighboring sector against the Third Army. German defense still relied on the accuracy and volume of mortar and artillery fire. By nightfall, the 276th Infantry held the southeast third of Forbach. The 274th Infantry had established two roadblocks on the Forbach-Saarbruecken highway northeast of town. The 275th Infantry had regrouped its forces southeast of Saarbruecken. More than 249 prisoners had been taken in this day of action, 100 of them in Forbach.

During the night there was no relief from the German shelling in Forbach, mostly from 88mm and 105mm guns. The next day resistance within the city was still composed of scattered strongpoints, mostly in basements that served as pillboxes. The Germans manning these strongpoints seldom surrendered until they were surrounded. Attacking planes of the XII Tactical Air Command blasted enemy positions during the afternoon, assisting the progress of the ground troops; and at the end of the day the 276th Regiment had reached the railroad tracks. There the regiment paused to consolidate positions and reorganize its units.

In the division center the 274th Infantry took the main German defense line of pillboxes and bunkers between Spicheren and Stiring-Wendel and then met the full fury of the enemy on Spicheren Heights. The regiment had to commit all its forces to the attack to take the heights, although German counterattacks persisted for days. Not until 27 Feb-

ruary was the regiment able to stabilize its positions on the heights, overlooking Saarbruecken to the north and Stiring-Wendel to the west.

On 22 February the 275th Infantry on the division right cleared the eastern two-thirds of its final objective, the woods south and southeast of Saarbruecken, and prepared strong defensive positions along the main line of resistance. That night a German tank attack was thrown back by bazooka and grenade fire. Enemy counterattacks continued during the next two days as elements of three German divisions, the 2nd Mountain and the 559th and 19th Volks Grenadier, took part in futile attempts to dislodge the regiment from these wooded heights looking down on Saarbruecken.

By the end of February the 70th Division had successfully concluded the first phase of its attack in the Sarre Basin. In the 11 days of the attack, its first offensive action as a division, it had penetrated the primary defenses of the enemy in front of the Siegfried Line and had established a foothold on German soil just south of Saarbruecken. More than 1,800 prisoners had been taken; and the division's casualties totaled 1,662, of which 207 had been killed and 231 were missing. XV Corps had thus fulfilled the requirements of the limited offensive on the Seventh Army left flank by bringing up the line to a new point of departure.

XXI Corps Re-Enters the Line

After completing its operational mission in the liquidation of the Colmar Pocket under the First French Army XXI Corps had reverted to Seventh Army control at 0800 hours on 16 February. XXI Corps had gradually given up control of the units under its command. On 9 February the 254th Infantry Regiment had reverted to the control of the 63rd Division, which was to take its place in the XV Corps line. Two days later the 75th Division reverted to control of Seventh Army. On 12 February the 2nd French Armored Division, which had for eight days served under XXI Corps in Colmar operations, was transferred to the First French Army. The 28th Infantry Division reverted to Seventh Army control on 14 February. When XXI Corps itself reverted to

Seventh Army command, it was planned that the 3rd Division would move to the Nancy area, its units on arrival passing into SHAEF reserve, although responsibility for supply, administration, maintenance, and rehabilitation remained a function of Seventh Army. By 15 February the 28th and 75th Divisions were enroute from the Seventh Army area, having been transferred to the Twelfth Army Group.

Arrangements were made for the XXI Corps to set up its installations at Morhange, south of St. Avold. The move was completed on 18 February, and plans were prepared to take over once again the left sector of the Seventh Army front. XXI Corps became operational on the army left flank as of 1200 hours on 28 February, assuming control of the 101st Cavalry Group, the 70th Division, the 63rd Division, the 12th Armored Division, and supporting troops. The plan of attack as previously directed by XV Corps was continued in force. XV Corps, with the 44th and 100th Infantry Divisions in the line and the 106th Cavalry Group in corps reserve, was to continue its policy of aggressive defense within its new boundaries. The last phases of the Seventh Army limited offensive prior to the launching of its major drive on 15 March were continued by the 63rd and 70th Divisions under XXI Corps.

Plans for future operations dictated the necessity of one more jump forward for the 63rd Division, which had reached and held the Bubingen-Bliesransbach line. On 3 March the division thrust forward to seize the Hahnbusch and the adjacent heights to the north. The Hahnbusch is a small forest 2,000 yards northeast of Bubingen and overlooking the town of Gudingon on the Sarre River.

Two diversionary raids, designed to confuse the enemy as to the area of the attack-in-scale, were carried out by units of the 254th and 255th Infantries. Almost six miles southeast of the Hahnbusch the 2nd Battalion of the 255th Infantry crossed the Blies River and raided the village of Babkirchen. A greater show of force was made at the small settlement of Hartungshof just north of Bliesransbach. This operation was carried out by Company C of the 254th Infantry, reinforced by machine gun sections from D and M Companies and a section of 105mm assault guns from the 749th Tank Battalion.

The plan of attack was to take Hartungshof early in the afternoon, hold it until night, and then withdraw under the cover of darkness. According to aerial reconnaissance reports, German armor was present in the village, so extra bazooka teams were drawn from A and B companies; and plans were made to soften up Hartungshof by serial bombing and strafing. It was believed that there were no more than 60 enemy defending the village.

At 1215 hours on 3 March a flight of P-47's from the XII Tactical Air Command bombarded the village. After a five-minute artillery barrage was fired, Company C left its line of departure and advanced toward Hartungshof through enemy fire. Three pillboxes, one of steel and two of concrete, on the route were reduced, and a German 88mm gun in the woods was knocked out by an attached bazooka team. House-to-house fighting continued all afternoon, with the troops using each building as an improvised fortress as soon as they had driven the enemy from it. At 2000 hours the company withdrawal began. Enemy dead in the raid were estimated at between 30 and 40, and 41 prisoners had been taken. C Company casualties were 27 wounded and 12 missing or dead.

Under the command of the 253rd Infantry, the main effort was being made by Company C, 253rd Infantry, and the 1st Battalion of the 255th Infantry, reinforced by elements of the antitank company, 255th Infantry, and the medium tanks of Company A, 749th Tank Battalion. On the right flank of the advance was C Company, 253rd Infantry, which was to seize the high hill known as the Birnberg, southeast of the Hahnbusch. The Hahnbusch itself was to be assaulted by the 1st Battalion of the 255th Infantry.

At 1405 hours on 3 March the attacking echelons moved out after the 861st Field Artillery Battalion had shelled the Birnberg for five minutes; and Company A, 99th Chemical Battalion, had smoked the Hahnbusch. As supporting tanks emerged into open country, they were fired upon by German antitank guns from the southern fringes of the Hahnbusch and from a stone quarry on the Birnberg. Six tanks were knocked out; and the remainder of the company drew back, reorganized, and moved into new positions to set up a base of fire for the infantry.

Troops of the 1st Battalion of the 255th Regiment were able to progress no farther than had the tanks, before the concentrated fire of the 88's and supporting automatic weapons forced their withdrawal. Waiting



BIRNBERG, SOUTHEAST OF THE HAHNBUSCH

"... the high hill known as the Birnberg ... six tanks were knocked out ..."

until night, Company B made an attempt to reach the Hahnbusch a little before midnight, but it was forced to dig in some 200 or 250 yards south of the woods.

Meanwhile, Company C of the 253rd Infantry had been attempting to clear the stone quarry on the Birnberg, from which intense fire was being delivered on the 1st Battalion of the 255th Infantry. By 2100 hours, when the attack came to a temporary halt, the southern, lower half of the quarry had been taken. When the attack was resumed on the next morning, the quarry was entirely cleared by 1155 hours; and defensive positions were organized from which the attack of the 1st Battalion on the left could be supported by fire.

In the 1st Battalion sector the attack on the Hahnbusch had been renewed at 0600 hours on 4 March. In the left zone Company A moved through the Hahnbusch and attacked the hill mass just north of the woods. A counterattack by German tanks forced the riflemen to withdraw to the northern edge of the Hahnbusch and dig in. On the right Company B had been unable to seize its half of the Hahnbusch, its strength had been broken and it was consolidated with Company C.

During the night Company B of the 253rd Infantry was brought up, and at daylight on 5 March it launched an attack to clear the right half of the woods. By 1210 hours the enemy had been driven from the right half of the Hahnbusch. Some 50 minutes later Company A reported that it had taken the peak north of the woods. The objective of the 63rd Division had been reached.

Farther west the 70th Infantry Division had also resumed the attack under the direction of XXI Corps on 3 March. The 276th and 274th Infantries were to advance to secure that part of their assigned objective northwest of the Forbach-Saarbruecken road. Combat Command A of the 12th Armored Division was to support the attacks against the cities of Forbach and Stiring-Wendel.

On the morning of 3 March the 276th Infantry, with a company of French and Belgians from the Lorraine Division attached, attacked in Forbach. The effective fire of the 884th Field Artillery Battalion, augmented by the guns of supporting tanks and the 648th Tank Destroyer Battalion, helped greatly in reducing the German resistance in buildings that were blocking the advance. The city was completely cleared that day, and units of Combat Command A pushed northeast of the city to block the road to Stiring-Wendel.

In Stiring-Wendel the attack of the 274th Infantry, also with a company from the French Lorraine Division attached, was progressing favorably. After a ten minute artillery preparation the regiment had launched its assault from the high ground south and southeast of the city with three battalions abreast. Resistance in the woods on the approaches into the city, centered in a few bunkers and other entrenchments, was not too great; but the rate of progress was slowed down by a number of well-placed mine fields. By late afternoon elements of the

2nd Battalion were fighting in the streets of the city; the 3rd Battalion was moving up on the Forbach-Stiring-Wendel road; and the 1st Battalion was astride the Metz highway northeast of the city. Upon request, a bombing and strafing mission was flown against the enemy entrenched near the railroad northeast of Stiring-Wendel.

When the regiment resumed the attack on the next morning, an increasing number of enemy strongpoints was encountered. Rotating and elevating pillboxes and bunkers, surrounded by belts of mines, became the centers of heavy fighting. German artillery and mortar fire from the direction of Schoeneck north of Stiring-Wendel harassed the operation throughout the day. Counterbattery fire was unable to silence the enemy guns. Air missions against them were requested, but the persistent low ceiling limited the use of planes. Despite this, however, at the end of the day the 1st and 3rd Battalions also entered Stiring-Wendel on its eastern and western outskirts.

The 276th Infantry in the meantime was moving out of Forbach. Heading north, the 2nd Battalion plunged into Forbach Forest; and west of the city Company I drove the enemy from the village of Marienau. On 5 and 6 March the 1st and 2nd Battalions continued the fight in the Forbach Forest, where the Germans were putting up stubborn resistance. At the same time the 3rd Battalion was cleaning out a wooded area northwest of Marienau.

The 274th Infantry had picked up the slow thread of its house-to-house fighting in Stiring-Wendel at 0800 hours on 5 March, when a group of approximately 250 ragged, Allied soldiers, Russians, Poles, French, Czechs, and Yugoslavs, came streaming down the Metz highway. These men had been inmates of a German prisoner of war hospital, north of the city. The 2nd Battalion later occupied the hospital area and liberated a total of 951 men. By the end of the day all of Stiring-Wendel had been taken; and units of the 12th Armored Division's Combat Command A moved in to assist in the mopping-up of small, scattered bits of German opposition that remained. Advance elements of the regiment, probing northward, ran into strong enemy defenses.

Similar reports were made by patrols of the 276th Infantry north of Forbach, and it was realized that the outpost of the Siegfried

defenses had been reached. Until these fortifications were reduced, a continuation of the attack was not deemed advisable. On 7 March, therefore, it was decided to hold in position pending the results of intensive reconnaissance. Upon orders from XXI Corps the 70th Division reverted to the defensive after 19 days of attack, during which time the division had liberated 18 towns and had taken 2,034 prisoners.

To the northwest the Third Army had already begun its penetration of the Palatinate, increasing the threat to the enemy troops occupying the Siegfried Line in front of the XXI Corps. Daily patrols of the 70th Division and the 101st Cavalry Group on the west flank of the corps front searched for signs of a German withdrawal as a result of this threat. On the morning of 13 March patrols finally noticed a sharp decrease in enemy activity.

Immediately verbal orders were issued to pursue the enemy to the line of the Sarre River between Saarbruecken and Volklingen. The 276th and 274th Infantry Regiments began to advance late in the afternoon. Small enemy delaying forces were found entrenched at roadblocks, but they were quickly captured or routed. The pursuit was maintained through the night and into the following morning when the 101st Cavalry Group on the left joined in the drive. Mine fields, antitank ditches, roadblocks, and wire hindered but did not halt the advance. Resistance remained light, and only sporadic fire was met. By noon the 70th Division had cleared Stiring, Schoeneck, Krughutte, Clarenthal, Furstenhausen, and Petite Rosselle. The 101st Cavalry Group had captured Gieslautern, Wehrden, Hostenbach, and Schaffhausen. Both units were now inside Germany, and their patrols reached to the south bank of the Sarre River.

Just prior to the Seventh Army offensive of 15 March XXI, XV, and VI Corps held a line running from Schaffhausen and Hostenbach on the Sarre River almost directly southeast through Haguenau to Oberhoffen, where it joined the First French Army near the Rhine. The line had been drawn tight by the elimination of sags, and preparations had already been made with the Third Army to clear the enemy from Germany west of the Rhine in the Saar-Palatinate.



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